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The Faces of Inclusion:
Historical Fiction in Post-Dictatorship Argentina

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the forms of representation of history in Argentina in three historical novels written between 1995 and 2003 during the period of continuing transition from dictatorship to democracy.

The first two chapters establish the theoretical framework for the analysis of the novels. Chapter One focuses on the socio-political context in which the historical novel re-emerged in Argentina after the last military dictatorship (1976-83). During the post-dictatorship period three phenomena have undermined the role of the state as a point of reference for the construction of national identity: the excesses of the military junta, the politics of oblivion of governments that absolved the crimes of the dictatorship, and the neoliberal policies of the 1990s that questioned the traditionally protective role of the state. The second chapter traces the evolution of the historical novel in Argentina from the nineteenth century to the present with an emphasis on the ideological changes in the principles that conditioned the fictionalization of national origins. While the historical novels from the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth projected the idea of exclusion in the formulation of the nation, the novels produced in post-dictatorship period are characterized by inclusion.

The last three chapters explore different aspects of inclusion expressed in three contemporary Argentinean historical novels. *La tierra del fuego* (1998) by Sylvia Iparraguirre embraces the heritage of Native people and of all those who were "disappeared" from national history. *Ese manco Paz* (2003) by Andrés Rivera proposes a view of history drawn from the sphere of the private world of the great figures of the past

rather than from their public lives. The last novel analyzed, *La passion según Eva* (1995) by Abel Posse, attempts to formulate national history on the basis of multiple perspectives representing different social groups and including the recent past in historical discourse.

The principle of inclusion, combined with the temporal and discursive fragmentation characteristic of the novels analyzed, suggest an historical project that escapes closed and predetermined structures and projects a vision for the future of the nation marked by a struggle for tolerance, freedom, and democracy.

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Introduction

> Hay palabras que cambian poco a poco: otras, las que importan, a veces mudan súbitamente su sentido. Durante años, cualquiera que leyera *Qué País* sabía que los signos que faltaban eran, sin duda, de exclamación entre indignada y harta: *¡Qué País!* Era nuestra manera de reconocernos, de decirnos sin necesidad de decírnoslo que compartíamos la pesadumbre y el hastío por una patria que siempre nos la daba por la nuca – o, por lo menos, nunca nos daba lo que queríamos de ella. Y era la forma de decir, también, que no tenía remedio: que ella era así, que qué se le iba a hacer, que había que joderse y buscarse la vida como fuera, sabiendo que esto no cambiaba. [...] *¡Qué país!* fue la síntesis de la protesta, de la desesperación ante el derrumbe, de las ganas de que se derrumbara, de ese miedo. Pero también pensamos que quizás qué país podría ser esa pregunta: ¿qué posibilidad nos queda de armar uno donde podamos vivir y ser un poquito felices? *¿Qué país?*
>
> (Martín Caparrós)

History in Latin America has always been a problematic affair. The very question of its beginnings, for example, immediately raises important inquiries. The past of Latin America consists of a series of ruptures each of which brought political, social, and cultural reorganization. Along with those transformations came a reformulation of the time of origin intended to legitimize the new situation. For much of Spanish America the ascent of pre-Columbian cultures, the arrival of Christopher Columbus, the colonial period, and the struggle for emancipation from Spain could all be considered as mythological times of foundation. The decision about the adoption of one of them over

the others, however, has always been a political one and has triggered mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion. This tendency was undisputedly present when Latin American nations were taking shape in the nineteenth century and the intellectual elite was producing national narratives that would legitimize the foundation of new political entities, provide a mythology that would serve to unite the population living within its borders, and project a direction for the future.

In the case of Argentina, the desire of the nineteenth-century ruling liberal elite in starting over, erasing the Indigenous past and the Spanish heritage from history was, as Noé Jitrik remarks (2005 83), was reflected in nineteenth-century literature, including the historical novel. Argentina was supposed to be a modern, ordered and efficient country modeled after European states like England and France and able to compete in the international market. Susana Rotker (20) points out that for this very reason the Native inhabitants of Argentina and the African descendents of slaves were considered backward and found themselves outside the nation. In his seminal book *The Invention of Argentina* (1991) Nicolas Shumway states that the exclusionist tendency in formulating the nation, which he calls an "exclusionist mythology" (xi), was even extended during the constitutional debate of the nineteenth century to encompass political groups. From the very beginning, therefore, the history of Argentina had to reflect the ambitions of the young country and consider only its most immediate past as its heritage in a way that depended on whatever group was in power. Not surprisingly, nineteenth-century Argentinean literature that contributed to the formulation of national narratives was preoccupied primarily by contemporary issues and the recent history of Independence and internal conflicts (see Jitrik, 1995 42).

Although the groups that would be included in the nation might be juggled in the course of Argentinean history, the paradigm of exclusion persisted as the predominant logic underlying the definition of nationhood. Its terrible apogee was reached during the Process of National Reorganization, the military dictatorship that claimed the lives of 30,000 Argentineans in the years 1976-1983. State terrorism and its ideological justification provoked a national trauma that questioned nineteenth-century epistemological paradigms on which the national discourse was based. Yet again, Argentina found itself at a crossroads. In the face of disenchantment with nineteenth-century narratives, national history had to be re-written once more. This time, however, the notions of both the nation and history had changed. In light of the exhaustion of previous projects of modernization it was no longer possible to constitute new ones according to the paradigms of exclusion and inclusion because the practices of the dictatorship and the neoliberal governments that followed it had left them thoroughly bankrupt. Moreover, the representation of history had become conditioned by newer forms of mass-media technology which, among other effects, speeded up the processes of inclusion of the recent past into historical discourse and made access to it more democratic. The recent historical novel in Argentina has to be read, therefore, in the broader context of post-dictatorship culture and the neoliberal crisis.

At the same time as the socio-political changes took place, they also begged for adjustments in how the past was represented, which had an inevitable effect on the historical novel. This genre was not exclusive to Argentina, of course, and has undergone several transformations since the nineteenth century. Fernando Aínsa in his 1991 article "La nueva novela histórica latinoamericana" and Seymour Menton in *Latin America's*

New Historical Novel (1993) both announce the emergence of a revised version of the genre. Aínsa enumerates the traits of the *new* historical novel to include the exhibition of a revisionist reading of official history; the deconstruction of national myths and demythologization of the past; the elimination of the epic distance between the narrator and historic events; the incorporation of parodies of historical archives; the rewriting of historical events; the superimposition of multiple time periods; and the questioning of historical truth. Menton, on the other hand, enumerates among its features the predominance of famous historical figures; a questioning of history *per se* and of historical claims to "truth" and authority; a deformation of historical events by exaggeration and patent "errors" in discourse; the use of parody, irony, intertextuality, metafiction, and self-conscious narrative that point to the constructed nature of historical discourse; and the presence of the carnivalesque, heteroglosia, and the dialogic, all of which facilitate multiple representations of history (14-38). Menton stresses that although the first new historical novels appeared as early as in 1949 (*El reino de este mundo* by Alejo Carpentier), the new version of the genre had become one of the dominant trends in Latin American literature by the late 1970s. In a special issue of *Monographic Review* titled *The "nueva novela histórica" in Hispanic Literature* (2003), Genaro J. Pérez and Janet I. Pérez added to the list of characteristics of the new historical novel enumerated by Aínsa and Menton in order to demonstrate that the term applies equally to Spanish peninsular literature and that it includes a "sub-category of subversive fictions by women writers who seek to remedy patriarchal historiography's silencing of the female across the centuries by writing women into history" (11). They also note that certain new historical novels aim to redeem characters hitherto condemned by official history, create

parallels between disastrous past events and the present, and defend the rights of minority groups (11-12).

To sum up, the new historical novel in Latin America, according to Menton, Aínsa, and Genaro and Janet Pérez, reexamines and deconstructs historical discourse. However, as María Cristina Pons argues in her *Memorias del olvido. Del Paso, Márquez, Saer y la novela histórica de fines del siglo XX* (1996), the main concern of the recent historical novel in Latin America is not to erase the difference between history and fiction. She refrains from referring to the *new* historical novel as a new genre or subgenre, as Aínsa and Menton are inclined to do, because the changes in the historical novel happened as a result of the evolution of both literature and history. More importantly Pons notes that the genre identifies epistemological problems within the forms of political domination expressed through the hegemonic discourse with which Latin American Modernity was defined. The historical novel of the turn of the twenty-first century suggests that the present from which the past is remembered is the result of inconclusive projects of modernization of the region. It dispenses with the principle of exclusion that characterized the national discourse since the nineteenth century by including elements that had hitherto been omitted. Pons concludes:

> La novela histórica latinoamericana de fines del siglo XX no propone borrar los límites entre ficción e Historia, entre los que silencian y son silenciados, entre los que dominan y son dominados, entre un allá y un aquí. Por el contrario, parecen querer acentuarlos con el objeto de poner en marcha un proyecto de lectura crítica de la historia como acontecer y como narrativa, y para destacar que la realidad de aniquilación, pobreza y marginalidad histórica de América Latina no es una construcción discursiva ni un objeto estético o de consumo, y mucho menos ficción. Pero es una lectura crítica de la Historia que se lleva a cabo desde fuera de los límites, desde los márgenes, desde ese espacio fuera del "hogar" en tanto espacio cultural, civil y político que la hegemonía no puede neutralizar; un espacio en el cual

> las intenciones y los actos alternativos pueden sobrevivir, y la potencialidad utópica puede perdurar. (269)

This rewriting of the projects of history shows the same preoccupations with the state of the country as the literature of anticipation to which Fernando Reati refers in *Postales del porvenir. La literatura de anticipación en la Argentina neoliberal (1985-1999)* (2006). According to Reati (14-15), the historical novel sought to explain Argentina's contemporary predicament through temporal displacement. While some novels compared the past with the present, pointing to similarities between the foundational periods of national history and the authoritarian rule of the military regime, others presented history as a source from which to explain the brutality of the junta through an archeological analysis of an apparently endemic violence. Reati adds, however, that the historical novel has become more superficial in recent years because it has concentrated on the private life of historical figures through the exploration of historical gossip and the intimate life of history's protagonists. Reati calls this type of fiction the "light" version of the historical novel which would subsequently lose its popularity in favor of what he calls a literature of anticipation that focuses on a projection of the country's future based on a critical understanding of the present.

My dissertation is concerned, precisely, with the "light" version of the historical novel; although I am not entirely convinced that Reati's characterization of it does justice to the genre. The transformations of the historical novel and its reappearance on the literary scene are partly due to transformations in perceptions of history and the epistemological crisis that led to the relativization of historical discourse. Hence its focus on a way of narrating the past by shifting the interest in it to the unexplored side of

history, such as the intimate life of its protagonists or its untold stories. However, the re-examination of national discourses in Argentina also has to be understood in light of the neoliberal crisis and the efforts of post-dictatorship governments to forget the recent violence and present the conflict spawned in Argentina as a clash of ideologies that were derived from the Cold War. In this vision of its past the country appears as an innocent victim of external forces. The actions and crimes of the military governments, and the exclusion of a part of society from politics and the nation, were relativized by the governments corresponding to Carlos Menem's presidency (1989-1999). This kind of political amnesia was, of course, unacceptable for the victims of the military and their families, as well as much of the society at large, and, in spite of official doctrines, many writers not only retrieved the forgotten past but also meditated on how it should be narrated and incorporated into the national discourse. In this respect, the recent historical novel is inscribed in what Idelber Avelar has called the literature of mourning in *The Untimely Present* (1999), a book about post-dictatorial Latin American fiction, that is, fiction that actively endeavors to come to terms with the dictatorship.

Against this background, the recent historical novel in Argentina re-evaluates the historical narratives that legitimized the nation. In doing so, it not only questions the national historical discourse but, like its nineteenth-century antecedent, also projects a vision for Argentina that is reflected in new ways of thinking about the past. My objective is to see in what way the historical novel in Argentina has responded to the political conditions of post-dictatorship and re-democratization and to determine how the concept of nation is re-examined. The fact that writers choose a traditional genre in order to discuss questions of nationhood confirms the possibility of a utopian project to which

Pons refers above. It indicates that behind the deconstruction of old narratives persists some sort of national project. Unlike its nineteenth-century antecedent characterized by the principle of exclusion, however, the historical fiction of the post-dictatorship period is distinguished by the principle of inclusion in order to encompass the history of minority groups that also constitute the story of the nation, diverse aspects of everyday life that are also part of the realm of history, and varied ways of writing about the past.

In order to pursue these objectives I have written my thesis in five chapters which may be grouped in two parts. The first two chapters establish the epistemological context for the emergence of the historical novel in the light of socio-political transformations in Argentina and the evolution of the historical novel as a literary genre that expresses a national identity. The remaining three chapters focus on three novels that illustrate how the principle of inclusion characteristic of the historical novel of the post-dictatorship is manifested in three specific novels.

The first chapter, "A Country without Identity: The Crisis of Modernity in Argentina", describes the context from which the historical novel reappeared on the Argentinean literary scene. Its return coincides with a major crisis in the meta-narratives that had shaped Argentinean Modernity and led to a sense of disillusionment with the role of the state. The chapter concludes that the political violence of the 1970s and 1980s, the politics of oblivion of governments that followed the military regime, and the neoliberal policies they implemented redefined the state as a point of reference for national identity. The crime of the military was its attempt to physically eliminate a part of society that stood in the way of socio-economic transformations. The failure of subsequent governments was their refusal to address the conduct of the military while, at

the same time, they also pursued economic policies conducive to social marginalization or economic exclusion. The attitude of the government confirmed a need to re-examine the narratives that made it possible to legitimize projects founded on pathologies that negatively affected the nation and blocked the way to modernization.

The second chapter, "From Exclusion to Inclusion: The Historical Novel in Argentina" traces the evolution of the historical novel as a factor in the shaping of the national imaginary. When the genre was brought to Argentina from Europe in the nineteenth century it provided a model of viewing the past that excluded from the national project the sectors of Argentinean society that did not correspond to the vision of the Liberals who created the mythology of the newly emancipated country according to their own political agenda. Although in time their vision was overtaken by other political perspectives that also found their way into historical novels, the principle of exclusion in the representation of the past persisted until the experiences of the 1970s and 1980s that traumatized the country and prompted a questioning of national narratives. In contrast to earlier examples of the genre, the key factor in historical novels that have appeared since the military dictatorship is the exploration of the principle of inclusion.

In the second part of my thesis I analyze three historical novels: *La tierra del fuego* (1998) by Sylvia Iparraguirre, *Ese manco Paz* (2003) by Andrés Rivera, and *La pasión según Eva* (1995) by Abel Posse. The selection of these novels is to a certain extent arbitrary in the sense that any group of recent historical novels likely reflects the characteristics mentioned above, itemized by critics such as Aínsa, Menton, and Pons, as well as a movement towards inclusion. However, I have chosen these novels because of the different historical periods they fictionalize and the different facets of inclusion they

represent. *La tierra del fuego* explores the idea of first contact between Europeans and the Indigenous inhabitants of Argentina; *Ese manco Paz* presents the nineteenth-century constitutional conflict that irrevocably divided the nation; and *La pasión según Eva* is dedicated to the life and rise to power of Eva Perón and therefore addresses the question of historicizing the nation in relation to a recent past.

Chapter three, "Remembering the Forgotten: *La tierra del fuego* by Sylvia Iparraguirre", is a reflection on the inclusion of groups traditionally silenced in historical discourse. The novel analyzed in this chapter concentrates on a particular Indigenous group omitted from national narratives, and the retrieval of their story points to a critique of the exclusionary politics that sought to erase from the national memory groups that did not correspond to the dominant Europeanized vision of the country of the nineteenth century. Iparraguirre's text refers directly to the Yamana people of Tierra del Fuego, but could be easily extended to the disappeared under the military regime. Thus the new narrative of part of the national past to include a group hitherto omitted from official discourse expresses a national project that embraces, on the one hand, the diverse ethnic and ideological heritage of the country, and, on the other, the memory of the disappeared throughout Argentinean history.

The principle of inclusion in official discourse is not limited to the insertion of the forgotten who found themselves outside the national project. The historical novel also explores the limitations of historical discourse itself and, more specifically, the possibility of inclusion of the private sphere in history as opposed to a discourse which emphasizes political and ideological aspects of public life. With this in mind, "*Patria* versus *patria*: *Ese manco Paz* by Andrés Rivera", the fourth chapter of this dissertation, focuses on the

re-writing of the biography of a national hero, General José María Paz, from the perspective of his private thoughts, family life, and physiological needs. The novel presents the nineteenth-century constitutional conflict between Federalists and Unitarians, but from a point of view that escapes traditional narratives. By foregrounding the private sphere of a national hero, history defined solely in terms of political struggle and ideological conflict is shown to be artificial and of diminished importance. The novel thereby points to the possibility of defining the nation in terms that not only include elements hitherto not considered worthy of being historicized but also suggests a more organic way to imagine the national community.

Finally, "History in the Present: *La pasión según Eva* by Abel Posse", the fifth chapter, explores the inclusion of recent history in the broader panorama of Argentina's past in an effort to convey a complex portrait of another historical figure, Eva Perón. The novel depicts Eva from a multitude of narrative perspectives. It presents her as a national icon driven by passions and attached to the nation by sentiments she shares with the masses. The emotional engagement in the project called Argentina that characterized her life is a value that Posse proposes as a unifying factor for the country. His polyphonic novel not only democratizes historical discourse by delegating the narrative to different voices, but also points to the impossibility of a hegemonic historical narrative as a source of national unity. Since the perceptions of Eva Perón are mainly emotional and highly conflictive, it is impossible to portray her in a traditional one-sided narrative. The story about her and, by extension, the history of Argentina must include the positive and the negative aspects of its past.

In my conclusion, I hope to draw on the novels I have analyzed in order to show how the historical novel has contributed to the development of a new historical project in Argentina. In her book *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis* (2001) Francine Masiello refers to the period after 1983 as the time of transition from dictatorship to democracy. Indeed, this is a time of re-discovery and new beginnings. The principle of inclusion that dominates the historical novel points to a democratic vision of the country resistant to a politics that persist in marginalizing elements of the nation omitted from the aspirations of the political elites and their goal of participation in global markets. As the historical novel rewrites national narratives, it creates space for all the voices that constitute Argentina, presents a variety of political opinions, and includes a broader spectrum of the population in the national project. In this sense, the historical novel takes a stand in the discussion about the nature of the country alluded to in the epigraph to this introduction. Although none of the novels analyzed directly proposes a project for the future of the nation, they do so by implication. By re-writing the origins of the nation and reconstructing its scope the historical novel provides not just a new vision of the past but a theoretical frame for the new Argentina of the post-dictatorship.

Chapter I

A Country without Identity:
Crisis of Modernity in Argentina

The return of the historical novel to the literary scene in Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century was related to several factors. Seymour Menton (25-32), one of the first North American scholars to describe the phenomenon, perceives the reasons for the renewed popularity of the genre in relation to a particular intellectual atmosphere since the 1970s that encouraged reconsiderations of history. Interest in the past rose in light of a growing awareness of the approaching Quincentenial of the arrival of Christopher Columbus and was part of a global discussion regarding history in media and intellectual circles about whether to celebrate or question its epistemological role. Indeed, the Quincentenial provided a direct inspiration for many novelists, like Abel Posse, who revisited the journey of Columbus in *Los perros del paraíso* (1983). But the anniversary also stimulated academic conferences, public discussions, newspaper articles and essays that dealt with history in a broader scope. Menton notes that this unprecedented interest in the past generated "a greater awareness of the historical bonds shared by the Spanish American countries, as well as *a questioning of the continent's official history*" (28, emphasis added).

This "questioning of the continent's official history" as an ideologically transparent means of recovering the past was not an attitude characteristic solely of Latin American intellectuals dealing with the history of the continent. The debate over the arrival of Columbus was influenced, as Menton remarks, by the relativization of

historical discourse and the so-called postmodern debate in the academy. The dispute opposed historians like Perez Zagorin, who defended the claim that history is an objective science and those, like Hayden White and Frank R. Ankersmit, who challenged this position by arguing that history is a discourse susceptible to the same mechanisms that characterize fiction and literature. According to them, history should not be identified as an unquestioned past but ought rather to be analyzed as a text that depends as much on its medium (how it is written) as on its subject (what is written about)[1]. Those arguments found fertile ground in Latin America.

In addition to circumstances that were intellectually propitious for the development of historical fiction, Menton points to the political crisis that touched Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. The increasingly grim situation generated by the ascent to power of military regimes acted as a catalyst for the popularity of the historical novel because it offered an escape from the overwhelming reality of political violence. Historical fiction undoubtedly had the potential to offer an alternative world that could, at some level, provide a psychological relief from a harsh reality, even more so, as Menton remarks (29), because antecedents for such literary escapism were manifested in Hispanic culture in the past. Nevertheless, the relation between the political crisis and the popularity of the genre seems to have gone beyond simple diversion. Among other

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[1] The positions of Zagorin, on the one hand, and White and Ankersmit, on the other, represent two extremities of the postmodern debate in historiography. However, most historians, like Geoffrey Eley and Keith Nield, although aware and sympathetic towards the challenges of contemporary social and cultural theory and fundamental societal changes formulated via the discourse of Postmodernity, do not accept all its assumptions uncritically.

In this dissertation, I do not intend to explore the postmodern debate in historiography in part due to the limitations of this work and in part because the influence of postmodernism on historical fiction is a vulgarized version of the trend, in the sense that fiction writers have a general understanding of the problem but do not fully embrace its ambiguity, the objective of history being the truth whereas that of literature remains the probable or the possible.

things, dictatorial regimes, like the one in Argentina in the years 1976-1983, imposed a vision of the nation based on a very specific tradition. During this period, writing about the national past in ways that questioned official discourse could potentially be interpreted by the authorities as subversive. Historical fiction functioned, therefore, more as a resistance to an oppressive regime than as a form of escapism.

The reasons enumerated by Menton for the reemergence of the historical novel at the end of the twentieth century are a part of a broader problem. The Quincentenial, the changes in the perception of historiography, and escapism, all of which contributed to the intellectual atmosphere that encouraged reconsiderations of history, were related to the disenchantment with Latin American Modernity gradually eroded by socio-cultural changes. This hypothesis is confirmed by Maria Cristina Pons's approach to the problem. In her monograph *Memorias del olvido. La novela histórica de fines del siglo XX*, Pons notes (20-26) that the historical novel developed in a context of general unease related to the disappointment with the liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s that induced artists to drift intellectually from the Cuban model of political change. The failure of urban guerrillas, and the subsequent resurgence of dictatorships and institutionalized violence, only deepened this sentiment of disillusionment and suspended the faith in utopian projects regardless of their political inclination. The disappointment in left and right wing programs was nothing less than a failure of modernizing ventures that constituted Latin American Modernity.

Pons also points out that the atmosphere of disenchantment was deepened by the economic crises that struck Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century. After World War II, import substitution industrialization, or ISI, was integrated into Latin

American economic policies. In an effort to limit the region's dependence on the international market, governments introduced economic measures like the nationalization of domestic industry to encourage a more internal, self-sustaining development. ISI was successful in countries with larger populations. However, while it was possible to harness a modest growth, the rate of economic development achieved was not sufficient to elevate them to the level of the developed nations of Europe and North America. It could be argued that in Argentina the limitations of ISI eventually gave rise to the last military dictatorship whose economic goal was the transition of the country to a free market system. This change could not have happened without the elimination of political groups, like the unions, that derived their power from protectionist government policies. Although the dictatorship only initiated the transition, it was completed by President Menem's governments and the implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1990s.

Equally important as internal political and economic turmoil, claims Pons, was the fact that as local transformations were taking place so was the globalization of the economy, politics and culture due to transnational developments and the simultaneous process of heterogenization of ways of resisting them. Thus, the crystallization of the historical novel was contemporary with a time that can be characterized by the decentralization of social activities and the diversification of social subjects and agents manifested in the rise of community based groups. Meanwhile, the Euro-North American postmodern phenomenon stimulated a debate that questioned the validity of nineteenth-century narratives and provoked an eventual rupture with the paradigms and models of the grand discourses that had dominated history from Liberalism to Marxism. The reconsideration of Western epistemology had a considerable impact on Latin America

and introduced the concept of postmodern consciousness that Pons defines as "una nueva sensibilidad estética, una nueva corriente de pensamiento y un nuevo estado de ánimo que corresponderían a una nueva realidad social: el agotamiento o crisis de la modernidad inconclusa" (22).

Before prematurely suggesting that in the rise of a postmodern consciousness one may find an explanation for the recent development of the historical novel in Latin America, some points should be made in order to proceed with an analysis of the circumstances of the return of the genre. In short, when the historical novel was in the process of reconstituting itself in comparison with its nineteenth-century form, Latin America was under the influence of global changes and local socio-political adjustments that demanded new ways of expression. Those transformations, as suggested by Pons, were part of a major crisis of an "unachieved" Modernity. Nevertheless, the very concepts of Modernity and Postmodernity must be reformulated with specific attention to the Latin American and Argentinean contexts. This is not to suggest that Postmodernity does not apply to the region due to some temporal delay which Latin America might experience vis-à-vis aesthetic tendencies developed in Europe and/or North America. Rather, Modernity and Postmodernity were appropriated and reformulated in Latin America in very particular ways. It is important to understand that Postmodernity does not exist independently but rather in dialogue with the particular context in which it occurs. Marcelo Paz remarks that in

> the Latin American cultural debate, the postmodern assault (and the terminology that comes along with it: deconstruction, fragmentation, decentering, etc.) is subordinated to a critical, resistant, and reconstructive tendency, at odds with the regressive, ahistorical, and cool discourse of

> post-modernity so pervasive in some areas of the Euro-North-American postmodern phenomenon. (243)

Thus, today's historical novel in Latin America can be considered a direct result of a crisis in Modernity, as Pons suggests, but it also has to be seen as articulated from local perspectives. Santiago Colás reconciles the notion of Postmodernity in the following manner:

> Latin American postmodernity demands that attention be given to the heterogeneity that exists (and continually reproduces and displaces itself) among the various artifacts produced under a variety of local social conditions and aesthetic traditions. But second, Latin American postmodernity demands that the "original", "native", or "unique" elements identified in those artifacts are not to be interpreted only in the light of those local phenomena. They must simultaneously be interpreted in light of differentiating global economic, political, and cultural processes that, although not immediately present, exert an ineluctable pressure on them. In critical practice, this means tracing the various local and global, social and political, cultural and aesthetic stands that are incorporated and transformed through the formal and technical activity of a text. (17)

In Argentina, the crisis of Modernity was triggered by a socio-political crisis that changed the role of the state in the formulation of national identity. The violence of the military regime, the politics of oblivion implemented by the democratic governments after 1983, and the implementation of neoliberal economic policies contributed to the dissolution of the idea of the nation-state that had its origins in the nineteenth century. In light of the failure of narratives that defined Argentina to date, the historical novel of the post-dictatorship reformulated national history in tune with the new socio-cultural situation of the country[2].

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[2] It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to pin-point the exact moment when the specific awareness of the crisis of Modernity was manifested in the historical novel. The formation of an historical consciousness is not a single definable moment but rather part of a process. It should not surprise us, therefore, that some historical novels were produced before or during the dictatorship, for example, *No se turbe vuestro corazón* (1974) by Eduardo Belgrano Rawson, the influential *Respiración artificial* (1980) by Rigardo Piglia, and

The Socio-Political Crisis in Argentina

The socio-political crisis that shook Argentina after the last dictatorship and precipitated the need for a new mythology that would revisit the ideological foundations of the nation was in reality the culmination of several critical factors related to constitutional discontinuity in the country between 1930 and 1983. The immediate outcome of such a long and ultimately brutal and ruthless period of political instability incited an escalation of preexisting identity problems. Those national preoccupations were detected by a British journalist, Miranda France, when she was writing an account of her stay in Argentina in the early 1990s. Trying to capture Argentinean identity she could not hide her astonishment when confronted with both the number and status of psychoanalysts in Buenos Aires. Almost every inhabitant of the capital, including school children, seemed to need psychoanalysis and France discovered that for *porteños*, as the inhabitants of Buenos Aires are called, it had several meanings. For some, psychoanalysis was a proof of intellectual sophistication while for others it was just a way to confirm their economic status. There were also those who thought psychoanalysis was essential for maintaining a healthy society. Not surprisingly, France found herself under the disturbing impression that Buenos Aires was populated by emotionally "sick people", and that Argentina, by extension, was a "sick country", a term that she would often hear from Argentineans themselves when referring to their homeland. Feeling increasingly uneasy with this peculiarity of *porteño* culture, France finally asked a friend of hers, a psychoanalyst as well, what would be found if one were to put Argentina on the couch, to which the friend

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Río de las congojas (1981) by Libertad Demitrópulos. Taking into account the necessary but unavoidable arbitrariness of the year 1983, this dissertation will however look at the crisis of Modernity from a post-dictatorship Argentinean perspective.

quickly replied: "A country that has no identity, that doesn't know what it wants to be" (France 56-57). For Miranda France this astonishing comment reflected the overwhelming feeling of confusion and frustration she could sense from everyone around her. Although the last military dictatorship, which was characterized by an unprecedented level of violence and repression, had been over for several years and the re-democratization of the country was under way, the horrors of the past still cast a long and dark shadow on the inhabitants of Argentina.

One does not have to be a specialist in Latin American studies to realize that the diagnosis of Argentina as a "country without identity" should not be taken literally. Argentina and Argentineans unquestionably have an identity and are able to differentiate themselves from the rest of the world. Their fascination for the national soccer team alone is a manifestation of a strong national pride, to say nothing of the myriad of cultural artifacts and attitudes that make Argentina unique. Argentineans identify themselves, to different degrees, with the national flag, anthem, history, and culture. They also share the belief that Argentina is an exceptional country, different from, and maybe superior to, the rest of Latin America, and, thus, see a future for the nation, however unclear it might seem to be.

All the same, the magnitude of relatively recent political events unquestionably undermined the idea of a singular coherent nation as the common denominator for all Argentineans. Contrary to what may have been implied, the popularity of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires rises above vain intellectual fashion. Rather, it points to a much more ambiguous rationale related to an emotional, economic, social and ideological crisis in post-dictatorial Argentina that not only disoriented individuals personally but also put

into question traditional points of reference. The most obvious explanation for such bewilderment can be easily found at the local level and is clearly related to the recent influence of military rule, the lack of prosecution of the people responsible for it, and the socially devastating policies of neoliberal governments.

The Violence

The years 1976-1983 are described in Argentinean history as the "Process of National Reorganization" (*el Proceso*), State Terrorism or the Dirty War, depending on the political agenda of the historian who describes it. Nevertheless, regardless of the name given to this period, the last military regime could easily be considered the single most important influence on the contemporary crisis of identity in Argentina. Political violence (from the right and the left), state repression, illegal and unexplained incarcerations, the inhumanity of torture and mass executions conducted against the civilian population by a highly organized state apparatus not only shook the faith in a national project but in other totalizing discourses as well. For this reason, the succession of military juntas constituted a turning point in the way of thinking of Argentineans and put into question the idea of the nation. As José Pablo Feinmann has commented:

> Es simple y terrible: que se haya llegado a tales extremos de horror pone en cuestión la identidad de un país. No éramos lo que creíamos ser. Y jamás volveremos a serlo. Por decirlo así: a partir de la ESMA[3], uno ya no puede ser argentino de modo en que lo era. (1999 102)

In order to grasp the extent of the trauma this period had on Argentinean society, it is important to emphasize that the political violence was not limited to state repression.

[3] ESMA (Escuela de Suboficiales de Mecánica de la Armada): the infamous Navy Technical School for NCOs where many of the "subversives" were incarcerated and tortured.

The military rule did not appear in a vacuum. The terror, although certainly not comparable to that subsequently organized by the state machinery, had started much earlier[4]. In the late 1960s and through the 1970s, Argentina was the stage for violent confrontations between police and urban guerrillas. The most powerful group was the left-oriented *Montoneros*, led by Mario Eduardo Firmenich and the Peronist Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo – People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) – led by Mario Roberto Santucho. The guerrilla organizations, inspired by Ernesto "Che" Guevara's slogan "Start one, many Vietnams", were destabilizing the country by using, among other things, terrorist tactics. They kidnapped and executed political enemies who were mostly representatives of industry, politics and the army; held and mistreated their prisoners in "people's prisons", attacked banks, police, and army headquarters.

The scale of guerrilla operations was both terrifying and overwhelming. María Ollier's study of guerrilla violence (117-19), which ends with the Peronist restoration of 1973, noted 1,243 cases of terrorist attacks of all kinds, for an average of slightly fewer than one a day, or about two every three days. It is important to keep these statistics in mind in order to understand the extreme tension behind the downward spiral of terror and counter terror. The guerrilla violence escalated once more in 1974 (after the Montoneros broke with Perón) and remained high throughout 1975. The guerrilla organizations were finally uprooted only after the military returned to power, in March 1976 (Lewis 51).

Although the military was efficient in eliminating the guerillas, the *Proceso* served as a justification for state violence that acquired dimensions previously unseen in

[4] A very convincing account of the overwhelming fear related to political violence that was paralyzing Argentina in the 1970s can be found in Abel Posse's *Momento de morir* (1997).

Argentina. The dictatorship attempted to forge, often in extremely violent ways, a society that would correspond to a predetermined political, economic, religious and cultural vision of social sectors allied with the military, hence the name "Process of National Reorganization". To achieve this goal, unthinkable abuses were committed when the military used a tactic in their war against terrorism that was first tested to destroy ERP guerrilla activity in the province of Tucumán. Luis Mattini, an ERP chronicler, explains it as follows: "If the golden rule of guerrilla war is that one should 'move among people like a fish in water,' then Gen. Vilas [responsible for the operation in Tucumán] responded by removing the water from around the fish" (in Lewis 108). In other words, the Argentinean army extended military operations to civilian society as a whole, which meant that everybody could be considered an enemy and have to face the military war machine. Perhaps the most direct consequences of this strategy were the *desaparecidos*, or disappeared: citizens taken by the authorities, who vanished without a trace and have never been seen since. According to Amnesty International, 30,000 people disappeared this way in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. People accused of being "subversive" were incarcerated in concentration camps, humiliated, tortured, and often killed. Families were separated and pregnant women imprisoned until their time of labor and then killed as their children were taken away and "adopted" by families or friends of the oppressors[5].

[5] The adoption of the children of the "disappeared" by their oppressors is a very controversial and disturbing consequence of the violence of the military regime that has been discussed in the media. It received public attention through the activity of the Asociación de las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, a unique organization of Argentine women who for nearly three decades have fought for the right to re-unite with their abducted children and the grandchildren they have never seen. The name of the organization comes from May Square in central Buenos Aires, where the mothers and grandmothers first gathered. The fate of the disappeared and their children was used as the main theme in the Oscar winning *Historia official* (1985) and more recently in *Cautiva* (2003).

Finally, certain prisoners were taken up in planes and tossed out alive into the River Plate[6]. The fate of others will never be known.

In official discourse, the so-called subversives were members of the *Montoneros* or *Juventud Peronista* or other leftist guerrilla organizations. However, the majority of the victims of the regime were *perejiles*, as Feinmann calls them, citizens who were not directly involved in any guerrilla activities but sympathized with left-oriented movements or ideologies. As Lewis (30) notes, it was highly fashionable in the 1970s to be identified with some sort of revolutionary group, especially among the intelligentsia. Many artists, journalists, writers, designers, psychiatrists, architects, and engineers joined the movement on the wave of a political vogue but never became involved beyond the level of intellectual interest[7]. As a result of a preemptive policy by the state, many of the victims of the regime were union activists, members of political organizations, intellectuals, journalists, teachers, sexual minorities, and other representatives of economic, religious, cultural and political sectors who were to be excluded from the process of decision making and from society itself. That is, anybody who did not subscribe to the "authorized" Argentinean model had the potential of being a "subversive".

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[6] The first public confession of an official involved in Argentina's "dirty war", Captain Adolfo Scilingo, was published in 1995 in Horacio Verbitsky's book *El vuelo.* It related with gruesome detail how hundreds of prisoners of the military regime from 1976 to 1983 were thrown to their deaths from airplanes.

[7] The guerrillas were military groups organized on three levels: the combat units, an active group of people ready to use force; the mass front organizations, legal organizations that were dedicated to forming the political, legal and propaganda support for the military groups; and beyond the front organizations were the sympathizers, the larger and less aware group of people who would work as informers for the movement or would provide it with hideouts, supplies, or basic equipment (Lewis 30).

According to Fernando Reati (1997 18), the dead, the disappeared, the imprisoned, and the exiled were the most obvious and dramatic manifestations of the repressions. Nevertheless, there were other forms of tyranny that affected all society and permeated social consciousness. To limit the victims of the state violence to this group only would be to reduce the experience of the 1970s and 1980s to individual cases and not, as was the case, to the society as a whole. One way or another, every Argentinean was affected by the terror of the dictatorship, a time that Ana María Shúa calls in her *El libro de los recuerdos* "the time of fear" (1994) and José Pablo Feinmann describes as follows:

> Tal vez esta experiencia la sabemos sólo quienes permanecimos aquí. Y es la siguiente: uno se enteraba de desmedidos horrores, desaparecían los amigos, o los conocidos o gente que uno no conocía pero de cuya desdicha se enteraba. Es decir, sabía de la existencia permanente del horror. Sin embargo, al salir a la calle lo que más horror producía era el normal deslizamiento de lo cotidiano. La gente iba a trabajar, viajaba en colectivo, en taxi, en tren, cruzaba las calles, caminaba por las veredas. El sol salía y había luz y hasta algunos días del otoño eran cálidos. ¿Dónde estaba el horror? Había señales: los policías usaban casco, en los aeropuertos había muchos soldados, sonaban sirenas. Los militares les hacían sentir a los ciudadanos que estaban constantemente en operaciones, que estaban en medio de una "guerra". Pero, a la luz del día, nada parecía tan espantoso como sabíamos que era. Quiero remarcar esta sutil y terrible vivencia del horror: *lo cotidiano como normalidad que oculta la latencia permanente de la Muerte.* (1999 95)

The repercussions of the dictatorship were devastating. As the military regime came to an end, demoralization, violence, and corruption were on the rise. Moreover, Argentina lost an important part of its intellectual elite as many were victims of the regime while others escaped the country to avoid repression and, despite democratic changes, decided not to return.

After the Violence: The Politics of Oblivion and the Neoliberal Crisis

In 1982 Argentina's defeat by Great Britain in the Falklands/Malvinas War disgraced the Army and incited protests that eventually led to the re-democratisation of the country. When the military regime finally collapsed in 1983, the grisly details of the crimes of the Junta slowly made their way to the public and were received with ambivalent reactions. A substantial part of Argentinean society had fallen victim to the military and was eager for justice to be done and for the crimes to be dealt with in a court of law. But the remainder, who, whether consciously or not, either contributed to the regime or, out of fear or convenience, chose to look the other way, denied the allegations against it, and justified the state driven terror by historical imperatives. Argentina, as they claimed, was in 1976 at the edge of a civil war brought on by leftist guerrillas that could destabilize the country, economically destroy it, and eventually impose communism on Argentina which was prevented by the military intervention.

The interest of *porteños* in psychoanalysis that drew the attention of Miranda France during her residence in Buenos Aires was inscribed precisely within the context of a confrontation with an overwhelming but vague and confusing reality. The truth about the dictatorship generated irresolvable personal and social conflicts thus leading to a national disarticulation that was magnified by official policies of democratic governments who ignored the crimes of the military and, in the end, absolved them from direct responsibility.

When the crimes of the dictatorship became public and the regime changed, intellectuals faced the insurmountable task of recovering the recent past and formulating it into a national discourse. This process led, among other things, to questions about how

to recuperate memory, how to bridge connections to the past, and how to represent and introduce it to the present as a part of a newly reformulated national identity. This task revealed itself to be quite difficult because national memory is based on recollections and omissions and in post-dictatorship Argentina, as Susana Kaiser points out, the decision about what was to be remembered and what was to be forgotten became quite problematic:

> historical accounts that are reshaped to fit and legitimize a present social order are based on the perception that the past influences actions in the present and the future, and that people's memories affect their beliefs and choices. The importance of the past and the political value of memories are precisely their active existence in the present. (6)

Memory, in other words, had its political value and not long after the fall of the dictatorship in 1983 different groups began to battle for the acceptance of their version of the past.

There were three main forces that disputed the right to formulate the past in the aftermath of the dictatorship. The first was the military, which never accepted either the "Dirty War" as a term or responsibility for its effects. The military could not agree with the adjective *dirty*, because, as they claimed, wars were never *clean*. Argentina was in a state of war from 1976 to 1983 and the peculiarity of this conflict consisted in the unconventional character of the enemy. The army, therefore, was forced to engage armed groups that were dispersed in society and indistinguishable from the rest of it. To win this war, special methods of investigation, which guaranteed an expeditious gathering of information from suspects, had to be implemented and this often took the form of institutionalized torture and oppression. The military concluded that the annihilation of guerrillas was the only way to save the country from becoming communist. Therefore,

the officers of the army accused of crimes against civilians should not be judged by a tribunal since they had won a war to save the country.

An opposing interpretation of the past was presented by groups related to Human Rights movements – Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, and HIJOS: Daughters and Sons for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence. They argued that it is impossible to speak of the situation in Argentina during the 1970s in terms of war. Rather than calling it a war, one should speak of massacres (Kaiser 8). Although it was undeniable that some politically oriented armed groups were active during that time and had the support of some sectors of the society, the extent of their activity never threatened Argentina as a state. As a matter of fact, guerrillas in Argentina were so marginal that the Cuban scenario seemed unlikely. Moreover, the extent of the repression went far beyond the fight against the "subversives" and amounted to an attack against society as a whole.

Last, but certainly not least, was a group represented by Argentinean politicians willing to negotiate guilt and punishment. They made efforts to present the Dirty War as a conflict between two foreign forces, two historical extremes, the left and the right. According to that vision of history, Argentina of the 1970s and part of 1980s was perceived as a society caught in the middle of the struggle between those two demonic forces. They were responsible for the chaos that devastated the country and forever affected those who survived it. In other words, all Argentineans were, as María Elena Walsh put it, "honrados sobrevivientes del caos" (qtd. in Feinmann, 1999 129). Ultimately, it was their task to rebuild society from the ashes of the years of turmoil.

From the outside, this last perspective on the past seemed to be the most balanced because it acknowledged the victims of the terror, while at the same time attempting to rationalize the excesses of both the military and the guerrillas. Additionally, it was a discourse that favored forgiving and forgetting so that it had the potential to resolve some of the short term problems that faced Argentina following the dictatorship without jeopardizing democratic changes. Yet, this view was ineffective in the long run and served as a legal and/or moral shelter for oppressors and collaborators of the regime. José Pablo Feinmann declares that it is impossible to speak about the "honorable survivors of terror" because the reasons for the violence in the 1970s and 1980s, regardless of political orientation, are not to be found outside but inside Argentinean culture and national history (1999 136-37).

The representation of the past as driven by outside forces that ripped the country apart suggests that no Argentinean could or should be held accountable for what happened. As an example, Feinmann points to the conflict between two Argentinean writers: Abel Posse and Tomás Eloy Martínez, both authors of acclaimed historical novels. Martínez publicly accused Posse of collaborating with the regime because he held a diplomatic position throughout the dictatorship. Posse reacted to this accusation in an open letter published in *La Nación* (Cartas de lectores, 23/12/97) in which he confirmed that, indeed, during the years 1973-1979 he worked as attaché in the Argentinean Consulate in Venice in Italy but goes on to suggest that this fact does not make him responsible for the abuses of the government. At the time, there was no alternative for him. He refused to give up his diplomatic career to defend extremists of the likes of Galimberti (Peronist Youth) or Firmenich (Montoneros). For Feinmann, however, Posse,

like many other Argentineans, does not see the connection between being a functionary of the government and collaborating with its killing machine because he shelters behind the theory that Argentina's demons are external to the country[8].

The theory of external forces can be identified as the starting point for processes in Argentinean politics that led to a denial of military crimes. If the 1970s were a time of fear, the 1980s and 1990s were a time of constant struggle between a will to remember and acknowledge the past, and what Reati (1997 11) calls the *politics of oblivion*: the official political agenda of post-dictatorship governments that led to the impunity of the people who were directly or indirectly responsible for the horrors done by the military.

Before the end of the dictatorship, in 1983, the Junta presented the *Informe Final sobre la Lucha Antisubversiva*, in which it justified the violence of the Dirty War and declared self-amnesty to prevent juridical responsibility after the re-democratization of the country. Nonetheless, the democratically elected president, Raúl Alfonsín, cancelled this law and created CONADEP – *Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas* – presided over by Ernesto Sábato. In 1984 CONADEP published *Nunca más*, a report that compiled testimonies and documented 9,000 cases of disappearance (out of an estimated 30,000). In December of the same year several high ranking officers were

[8] During his residency in Venice in 1976, Abel Posse wrote a novel, *Momento de morir*, that he published later in the 1990s. It is a rather strange novel that presents the 1970s from the perspective of an "innocent citizen" who, little by little, is first terrorized by some political, indefinite, although leftist, forces and then forced to abandon his house and flee to the backcountry. Unfortunately for him, he is found there by one of the fearful brigades operating in the area. At the moment when he is about to be executed by the chief of the brigades he shoots his oppressor. In this way, he miraculously ends the terror, becomes the leader of the brigades, and restores peace in the entire country. The story, although fantastic, vividly pictures the situation of terror which normal citizens had to suffer in the years of guerrilla terror during the peronist restoration, the presidency of Héctor Cámpora and his amnesty of the guerrillas. Nevertheless, two things stand out: first, the representation of the political situation of Argentina where some ideologically external forces are destroying the country "out of the blue", and second, that peace is reestablished by the elimination (violent, physical elimination!) of the leader of those forces.

sentenced to life imprisonment, but the process of justice stopped at this point. The trial of the Junta provoked thousands of claims against other military officers and in 1986, out of fear of a return to social instability, the Congress passed *The Ley del Punto Final*, a law which placed a deadline on the presentation of evidence against the military. The passage of this bill ensured that no claim against the members of the Armed Forces would be taken into account by Argentinean courts. Finally, the complete impunity of the military was secured in 1987 through another law enacted after a revolt of a group of soldiers called *los Carapintada*. The *Ley de Obediencia Debida* absolved all members of the military of responsibility if they could establish they were acting under direct orders from a superior. In this way the Argentinean Congress excluded all low ranking officers and soldiers from liability for torturing prisoners during the dictatorship. Thousands of cases were dropped in trials against the military as soon as they were able to prove that they had acted under orders from a higher ranking officer[9]. In what would amount to yet another crime against the people, after years of violence, only about 40 officers were eventually sentenced. The majority, however, were exonerated in 1989 and the rest in 1990 after an amnesty proclaimed by President Carlos Menem. This last measure made it impossible for any judicial action to be taken in the future against those who violated human rights in the years 1976-1983. Despite the fact that in the 1990s many members of the military publicly confessed to the role of the army in the conflict and to the horrible measures taken in the fight against the "subversives", no further legal action was taken against them.

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[9] This law was cancelled by the Congress in August 2003.

The politics of oblivion were not limited to absolving the military responsible for the Dirty War. None of the politicians, businessmen, church representatives or mass media owners who backed the regime and benefited from it were ever forced to face any consequences for their involvement in the *Proceso*. Feinmann (1999 102-03) remarks that the economic establishment, represented by José Martínez de Hoz, Minister of Finance during the dictatorship, was responsible for the atrocities of the regime to the same degree as the military itself. The business sector benefited greatly from the radical economic changes that could have happened only if the very strong unions and the working class were excluded from the decision making processes. Already, at the beginning of the dictatorship, in 1977, Rodolfo Walsh, in *Carta abierta a la Junta Militar*, denounced the economic sector as the motor of the *Proceso* without which the Dirty War would never have taken place. Despite voices that condemned and accused the economic sector, none of those responsible were ever put on trial or were officially accused of contributing to the excesses of the regime. As a matter of fact, there is no law in Argentina that would make such an accusation possible. In this sense, the impunity and the "oblivion" of the 1980s and 1990s constitute a continuation of the military project of "purification" of society towards a specific political, religious and cultural model that found its most forceful articulation in the violence of the regime.

The refusal to address issues of responsibility by certain interested sectors of Argentinean society, combined with the exoneration of the army and the undermining of other sectors that participated in the regime, provoked a vacuum in the national psyche. León Rozitchner addresses this point when he writes that

> se juzgó a un puñado de militares culpables del terror de Estado pero no se incluyó en el juicio a los otros poderes responsables: el económico, el político, el religioso, el de los medios de comunicación. En la medida que se exculpaba a los otros poderes, la gente no pudo hacer las reflexiones necesarias: quedó sentada frente al televisor, mirando imágenes de horror y de muerte, a las que se había despojado de sonido y sentido. (qtd. in Reati, 1997 18)

As a result of this legal prolongation of the preceding horrors, impunity became the new Argentinean nightmare that, after the trauma of direct terror, shook civil society perhaps even to a greater degree than the dictatorship itself. One might ask: if there are no persons responsible, how could there have been victims? Such was the social, political and cultural paradox in which Argentineans found themselves in the 1990s, described by Reati in the following terms:

> En los años setenta, lo siniestro consistía en la presencia en las calles del fantasma de la desaparición, la prisión y la muerte, sabiendo todo ciudadano que ésa era la realidad subyacente bajo la aparente inocencia de lo cotidiano. Hoy lo siniestro consiste en la presencia en las calles de los culpables compartiendo el espacio público con la ciudadanía. (1997 17)

The politics of oblivion can therefore be considered yet another disappointment that weakened the role of the state in the formulation of national identity. While the violence broke the idea of the responsibility of the state to protect its citizens, its failure and unwillingness to bring to justice military officers responsible for the crimes of the dictatorship questioned even the most basic sense of decency on the part of the state. It was difficult, if not impossible, to maintain or re-create a persistent national identity when the most recent past was obscured by indecisive policies and the denial of the crimes of the military. The moral evaluation of the most influential period in contemporary Argentinean history was constantly being dismissed by political explanations and exonerating laws. The inconsistency in dealing legally with the

dictatorship and the overwhelming impression of impunity for the crimes committed by the military elite led to yet another crisis of discourses: mistrust in the underlying principles of democratic society.

Mabel Moraña (31-37) locates the main challenge for identity and democracy in post-dictatorial Argentina in the predominance of an institutionalized oblivion in the Argentinean national discourse. For Moraña, national identity is not a fixed notion but rather an ongoing process that requires the memory of traumatic experiences to first dissolve pre-existing national constructs and then re-articulate them according to the needs of the present. Such a scenario would leave room for recollection, forgiveness and national reconciliation, if conducted from the dominant position of the government. Since the political situation after the dictatorship made it impossible to formulate a satisfactory national discourse about the recent past, the nation found itself in an emotional and moral vacuum which made it difficult, at best, to readjust its identity. In other words, by discarding the question of human rights from the public sphere, the neoliberal governments not only affected the political agreements that were at the foundation of the re-democratization of Argentina but also negated the hopes pinned upon democracy as a unifying narrative, affecting the re-construction of national identity. All in all, democracy turned out to be yet another empty message.

On the whole, the formulation of national identity in post-dictatorship Argentina turned out to be somewhat ephemeral due to disenchantment with national experiences and the numerous interpretations of the past which challenged a unified national discourse. In the chaos of conflicting claims about the past, the government renounced its role as a point of reference. In short, the state failed to provide a coherent discourse and

made efforts to redirect the public interest from memory to consumption[10]. Neoliberal governments were not interested in proposing or enforcing any type of national agenda. Given that a central or official discourse would be open to challenge, any discourse had the potential to destabilize the country and block its economic development. Hence the effort to turn national preoccupations into a quest for domestic commodities which would eventually boost the economy. The politics of oblivion and the idea of forgetting without knowing what should be forgiven was a pragmatic move by the government to keep certain issues unresolved.

If the fiasco of the dictatorship led to major reevaluations of national identity in a political sense, the economic crisis and the international debt undermined the role of the state in a more basic way. Beatriz Sarlo (2002 15-19) argues that nationality cannot be considered exclusively in terms of an imaginary and points to the contract between citizens and the state:

> Ser argentino implicaba trabajar, leer y escribir, votar. Ser argentino también significaba un imaginario articulado por principios de orgullo nacional, posibilidades de ascenso social y relativo igualitarismo. (2002 28)

Despite this contract, the state put its legitimacy into question, first, by using the apparatus of mass repression against the civil population to force an economic agenda that consisted of abandoning ISI. Then, neoliberal governments maintained the same economic priorities and similarly failed to provide the necessary environment to

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[10] The question of the culture of consumption in Argentina is analyzed by Feinmann (1999) and Sarlo (2001). A clear example of the redirection of attention from the past (dictatorship) to the present (consumption) by the government is provided by Victoria Ruétalo in a case from neighboring Uruguay. Like Argentina, Uruguay went through a period of dictatorship (1973-1984) which consisted mostly in the incarceration of "subversive" elements. Prison, then, was the symbol of repression. When the dictatorship ended, the biggest prison in Montevideo was successfully transformed into a shopping mall.

guarantee work and income to all citizens[11]. As those basic rights and securities were trampled upon and, eventually, neglected, the relation between the people and the nation-state became more and more loose. Sarlo concludes somewhat sadly in her essay that "no vale mucho ser argentino" and that the fragmentation of national identity brought quite unexpected results: "Del estallido de identidades no surgió una nación plural, sino su supervivencia pulsátil. La nación se perdió en el laberinto de la pobreza" (2002 19).

From Socio-Economic Crisis to Reformulations of National Discourse

Given the degree of political, social and cultural chaos produced before the eventual end of dictatorship and the legal wrangling over the exoneration of those responsible, the comment by Miranda France's friend cited above that Argentina is a country without identity seems less surprising. The years of violence during the Dirty War and the politics of oblivion, which served to protect the leaders and participants of the old regime from criminal and civil responsibility, could only add to the shattered concept of a national identity. The terror and abuses that took place between the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s provoked disenchantment in both left and right wing projects. The political right lost its credibility and public legitimacy after its crimes, the war it lost against Great Britain, and the economic crisis into which it steered Argentina. The left, on the other hand, was looked upon as a destructive force that fuelled the downward spiral of terror and counterterror. In this light, the question of whether the clash within society was generated by external "foreign" forces or internal "native" conflicts that had accumulated over the years seemed secondary. What persisted after the "war" and during the years of

[11] The question of neoliberal policies is taken up again below in Chapter 5.

transition was a distrust towards grand narratives, local or global, which had captivated social and political life in the past.

The democratically elected government failed to provide a satisfactory discourse that would deal with the emotional scars left by the dictatorship. Nevertheless, the conciliatory interpretation of the military regime as the conflict of "two Devils" and the abandon of the topic proposed by politicians was not the only discourse in the "battle of memories". Through the mass media other, non-official versions were making their way to the public. Some of them represented the human rights organizations which kept on demanding justice and punishment of those responsible for the crimes against the society. Others came from the military whose officers started in the 1990s to confirm the crimes of which they were suspected. The diversity of versions of the past presented by the media was also reflected in the production of testimonial novels which contradicted the official discourse and presented a personal account of the events that took place during the *Proceso*. Probably the two most poignant examples of this genre were *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (1981) by Jacobo Timerman, a *desaparecido*, and *El vuelo* (1995) by Horacio Verbitsky, which integrated the testimony of the one time Argentinean naval officer, Captain Adolfo Scilingo, who had admitted to active participation in the infamous flights over the River Plate during which political prisoners were thrown from planes. His case is especially interesting because, rather than taking shelter in the exonerating law of *Obediencia Debida*, Scilingo presented his role in the Dirty War not as a crime but as a duty to the country and used it to demand a fair trial, which would take this perspective into account. Regardless of his political allegiance, Scilingo's argument in *El vuelo* corresponds to the patriotic national discourse that had pervaded

Argentinean culture since the times when the Army gained a decisive socio-political role in the movement for independence in the nineteenth century. This type of patriotism, which accepts inhumane strategies to secure higher goals, can be exemplified by the following excerpt from a speech by Nicolás Rodríguez Peña[12]:

> Que fuimos crueles. ¡Vaya con el cargo! Mientras tanto, ahí tienen ustedes una patria que no está en el compromiso de serlo. La salvamos que debíamos salvarla. ¿Hubo otros medios? Nosotros no los vimos, ni creíamos que con otros medios fuéramos capaces de hacer lo que hicimos. Arrójennos la culpa al rostro y gocen los resultados. ¡Nosotros seremos los verdugos, sean ustedes los hombres libres! (qtd. in Massot 2)

Although Verbitzky did not share Scilingo's views and exposed the criminal character of the military[13], the existence of a tradition that legitimated political violence and the fact that some individuals would embrace it were irrefutable.

The "battle of memories" confirms that different and opposing discourses concerning the past and the future of the country coexist in Argentinean culture and, likewise, explains the belligerence between the two sides of the conflict that led to the pathology and malfunctioning of the dictatorship. The Process of National Reorganization was, among other things, an effort to impose a national organic unity, an endeavor that was characteristic of many projects of modernization in Latin America. As Norbert Lechner observes, "Latin American democracy has always been permeated by a distrust of plurality seen as an improper questioning of national unity" (155), so it comes as no surprise that the military opted for a homogenizing process that would re-install order and bring prosperity. What the leaders of the *Proceso* had overlooked, however,

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[12] Nicolás Rodríguez Peña (1775-1853), Argentinean army officers and politician, participated in the May Revolution and in the First Junta. In 1812 he formed part of the second triumvirate. He died in exile.

[13] Adolfo Scilingo was ignored by the majority of the military and did not find sympathy from the public. Since the juridical system in Argentina was not willing to hear his version he eventually ended up in Spain where he was convicted and sentenced to 640 years in prison on April 19, 2005.

was the fact that such a unity, even taking into account the eventually successful extermination of socially subversive elements, was absolutely impossible in 1976. The tragedy of Argentina was rooted in the fact that this imagined social unity began to erode with the socio-economic changes that took place at the turn of the nineteenth century with the advent of mass immigration, industrialization and the rise in political importance of a cosmopolitan urban population. Those transformations forced the traditional oligarchy to share their political power and gradually introduce democracy (Halperín Donghi, 1993 188-91). This, in turn, led to the rise to power of Hipólito Yrigoyen's Radical Civic Union which eventually triggered the first military coup in 1930, a date that Paul H. Lewis considers to be the true beginning of the Dirty War.

Every military intervention since then can be seen as a forceful attempt to return to a certain ideal of a nation and, of course, everything becomes problematic with a similar agenda. If nothing else, to revisit an organic unity presumes the pre-existence of such a state of affairs at one point in Argentinean history, which is itself arguable. As Nicolas Shumway states throughout *The Invention of Argentina* (1993), from the very beginning of the emancipation of the country two competing and conflicting visions of what the nation was supposed to be were at play[14]. With the gradual modernization this dichotomy, rather than disappearing, became even more complicated and fragmented as new internal and external ideologies were shaping the country. If the Dirty War were to be considered the culmination of an unsuccessful Modernity, it would be so because it was a manifestation of the incompatibility between the actual social, economic, political

[14] Shumway's position is taken up again below in Chapter 4.

and ideological plurality of Argentinean society and the totalizing discourse represented by the conflicted groups[15].

To sum up, after the dictatorship Argentinean national identity went through a period of increased instability which was provoked by several internal negative experiences. Among these, the most visible were the *Proceso* as a period of terror and violence, the mistreatment of national memory through the politics of oblivion in the aftermath of the dictatorship, and the economic crisis that excluded a substantial part of society from participating in the nation as equal citizens under neoliberal regimes. It became obvious that the common denominator – to be Argentinean – was beginning to reflect different, and sometimes opposing, meanings with respect to identity. The previously quoted remark of Miranda France's friend on the psychological state of Argentina – "A country that has no identity, *that doesn't know what it wants to be*" (my emphasis) – confirms this observation. What can be extrapolated from this comment is that there is not one but many identities in Argentina. Each one of them represents a different point of view and a different idea for the future of the country. Thus it is impossible to speak about identity in a singular and fixed sense. Rather, one finds several conflicting meanings and versions. If a single project cannot be distinguished or decided upon, a single identity, in fact, does not exist.

However, the formulation of identity as a disjointed entity does not have to be understood negatively. The fragmentation of national identity is neither something unique

[15] This paradoxical ambiguity was visible even in the inconsistency and plurality already mentioned within the ranks of the political "left" and "right" that clashed during the 1970s. Although those groups are, for reasons of clarity, ideologically labeled as "left" and "right", they were neither politically nor structurally coherent. For more information about the diversification of political groups during the Dirty War, see Lewis.

for Argentina nor a confirmation of the claim that, effectively, it is a country without identity. Fernando Aínsa (2002), like Mabel Moraña, affirms the notion of identity as an ever changing process and embraces its fluidity. According to Aínsa, each individual moves simultaneously in various identity circles, from the individual and familiar, to the wider circles relating him/her to, for example, a community, religion, country or nation. Some of those circles are fixed and some are fluid. There are two forms of unity that coexist simultaneously within identity: one that closes in on itself and longs for permanency, a mono-cultural social organization, and clear origins, while the other opens up and confirms itself through the integration of the new. Identity, in other words,

> appears to be the result of variable positions and not founded in definitive form [...], that is forged through confrontation and coincidence. Nor is it something homogeneous or fixed, rather it is a multiple and transitory condition that happens in conjunction with the always changing cross between cultures. It is far from being a clearly designed puzzle that can be put together with the cut fragments of a whole that can be reconstituted as a whole picture. (Aínsa, 2002 68)

The fact that identity cannot be formulated in a traditional homogeneous way does not necessarily indicate a questioning of its very existence but suggests a re-formulation of its definition. In times of global economics, communications and mass movement of people, when cultural goods and opinions are constantly being exchanged and appropriated through increased technology and transportation, the frames of identity begin to lose their rigidity, if ever they had one. The result, of course, is that they become much more open to possibility. This is why Aínsa suggests new frontiers for the notion of identity:

> [...] the distinctive, what identifies us, is no longer synonymous with homogeneity and does not necessarily coincide with the limits of a determined territory. Moreover, it can no longer vindicate itself through a collection of texts, objects to be conserved, well-defined roots, or immovable rituals and symbols fixed once and for all if not turned into

> stereotypes repeated without question. The progressive disappearance of barriers throughout the world, the spread of communications, and the radical changes in the forms of production and circulation of cultural products formerly identified as "national", have led to this process of "deterritorialization" in which one recognizes a certain kind of Postmodernity. All identifying systems – that is to say the set of cultural, social or historical traditions to which a community belongs, and to whose destiny it is bound for better or worse – can no longer be presumed organically contained. (2002 60)

In other words, Argentina is a country with an identity, but this notion must be reformulated in the light of internal and global changes. The former utopian identity, understood as an organic unity formulated in the nineteenth century, effectively collapsed under historical circumstances. The reformulation of the notion of identity found its expression in the historical novel which reflects a certain historical consciousness in times of sudden change or crisis. The crisis in question was the failure of, or disenchantment with, Modernity in Argentina, both in a socio-political and aesthetic sense and as a consequence of the change to a new consciousness which, among other things, begs to challenge old narratives that do not stand up in the light of changes that affected the country.

In fact, Argentina is not alone in this situation. As Emil Volek remarks, Latin America had been undergoing gradual transformations since the late 1950s, which he lists as follows: i) modern technology has helped overcome the lack of traditional infrastructure in communications; ii) dictatorships have been replaced by democracy and military regimes have been replaced by civil societies; iii) the Catholic Church has found strong competition in the presence of rapidly expending Fundamentalist Protestant churches that have actively contributed to changing social attitudes; iv) mass economic and political migrations to the North have created new Latin American territories that not

only project Latin American culture to the North but also influence the South culturally; v) Indigenous communities have been integrated into the global market through the internet without the intermediary of the State or non-aboriginal "middlemen" which, among other things, has given the Indigenous languages a presence in international virtual forums; vi) the natural world has lost its dominance in the Latin American imaginary, becoming degraded and endangered; and, vii) Latin America has become an important consumer of drugs rather than just their producer, which has brought the region closer to the problems faced by the North (xi-xiv). Volek sums up the importance of all those changes:

> In the process of these changes, many old securities have been lost: the position of the cultural elites as guardians of the national project, the very project of national culture as something homogeneous, the State as benefactor, and the nation itself as it emerged from the nineteenth century imaginary. Concomitantly, old insecurities have been aggravated: the old anguish about Latin American "identity" regarding the past, present and future. (xiv)

As outlined earlier, Argentina has recently experienced transformations similar to those occurring in the rest of Latin America and shared some of the same insecurities as, for example, the fragmentation of national identity. On the one hand, identitary disarticulation could be explained by the epistemological crisis in Western philosophy. On the other, it is difficult to miss that the fragmentation of national identity took place not as a result of theoretical deliberations about the nature of the nation but rather as a direct result of the historical transformations described in the previous section of this chapter. According to Benedict Anderson, a nation is

> an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.

> It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (6)

It is limited because it has finite, albeit elastic, boundaries beyond which exist other nations. It is sovereign because it came to maturity at a stage of human history when freedom was a rare and precious ideal (6-7). Along these lines, Argentina, like any other nation, is an imagined community, in the sense that Anderson gives to the term, and it is possible to trace national narratives that led to its imagination (see Nicolas Shumway). Such an approach to the question of nation has, of course, its ramifications. First, the nation is no longer perceived or presented as a natural entity, but as a construct that depends to a large degree on the political powers that produce the national discourse. Second, the nation, a metanarrative *par excellence*, and thus a cultural construct, has lost its universal character and become relative. As the relative nature of this discourse has become increasingly apparent it has become susceptible to being more heavily deconstructed, thereby creating room for a critique describing the arbitrary power structure within it.

In recent years, the cultural narratives that contributed to the "imagination" of Argentina do not coherently legitimize the political, economic and social changes that have affected it. On the contrary, these narratives expose the crisis in which the country found itself, making it easier to conceptualize Argentina as a country without identity because traditional formulations remained insufficient and conflicted with new historical circumstances. In this situation a fragmented identity, loosely related to the idea of the nation became a way of resisting the ethically doubtful and totalizing metanarratives of modernizing projects without, however, rejecting the need for a unifying narrative.

An example of the rejection of metanarratives produced by the establishment can be found in the riots of December 19-20, 2001. As a result of the policies of the IMF, Argentina found itself in a very difficult economic situation. In 2001 the country entered its deepest crisis in recent years which generated protests by the middle class whose access to their life savings was limited or denied. Eventually, social discontent led to the resignation of two consecutive presidents (De la Rua and Rodríguez Saá). The unifying slogan of the people in demonstrations, the so-called *cacerolazos*, was "*Que se vayan todos*", which called for the rejection from politics and finances of all the politicians to date that were accused of moral and fiscal corruption. At the same time as the demonstrations of the middle class there were popular protests like, for example, those by workers of the Cerámica Zanón in Neuquén.

However, the rejection of political structures and the fragmentation of social organizations did not negate a need for a unifying narrative, an aspect of Postmodernity with respect to Latin America that Nestor Lechner (153) doubted from a theoretical point of view. The necessity for a reformulation of national narratives in Argentina that resulted from the events of 2001 is exposed in the Canadian documentary *The Take* (2004), directed by Avi Lewis, and the Argentinean *La dignidad de los nadies* (2006) by Fernando E. Solanas. Nostalgia for unifying values and notions among those who rejected the political establishment is probably the most poignant message of both documentaries. Despite the fact that the metanarratives that organized social life in Argentina failed, people in the streets of Buenos Aires in 2001 were chanting the slogan "Argentina, Argentina", and parading with national flags. Although both symbols were

empty, in the sense that there was no clear narrative behind them, they substituted for a unifying idea that yet had to be formulated.

The historical novel in post-dictatorship Argentina questions the ways in which Latin America imagined itself under western historiography and in this way reformulates Argentinean identity. It is an expression of a new historical perception and sensibility that corresponds to the social, political and cultural changes in Argentina. The doors to literary reinterpretation, reformulation and rewriting of the past were opened by the fiasco and exposure of the last dictatorship, the politics of oblivion, and the neoliberal economic policies that led to disenchantment with totalizing national projects. After all, the abuses of the regime were ideologically grounded in the very best national traditions of the country and a certain vision for its future that dated back to the nineteenth century. According to the military, the values on which the country was built were endangered by foreign and subversive forces, and the "Process of National Reorganization" was put in place to restore deeply authentic Argentinean roots, a goal that was both futile and impossible in times of mass culture. Of course, part of the official discourse of the "Process" was dictated by the pure and coldly calculated ambitions of a group of people that craved political power. Unfortunately, the same discourse was also perceived as genuine because it originated in traditions so deeply ingrained in the national psyche that they seemed unquestionably true and morally justified to "average citizens". Hence the tragedy, indisputable I think, of individuals like the aforementioned Captain Scilingo whose blind faith in the righteousness of the regime pushed him to throw dozens of unconscious people from planes flying over the River Plate in the name of mother Argentina. And Scilingo was not, I am sure, the only one to have been carried away by

the national discourse. My point here is not at all to exonerate those who remained loyal to the authorities between 1976 and 1983 but rather to call attention to the fact that the violence in Argentina was fuelled by cultural narratives that had existed for a long time. Those cultural narratives were, as history proved, extremely powerful and could justify the bloodshed that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as earlier. The "Process of National Reorganization" compromised not only the political vision of the Argentinean "right", but more importantly, national mythologies disgraced by the horror they endorsed.

Chapter II

The Historical Novel in Argentina: From Exclusion to Inclusion

> – Pero me parece que con esta crisis habría que pensar en alguna otra opción.
> – ¿Cómo con esta crisis? ¿Cuándo no hubo una crisis acá? Quiero decir, si no es inflación es recesión y si no es recesión es inflación, si no es el Fondo Monetario es el Frente Popular.
>
> (*El hijo de la novia*)

The crisis of modernity in post-dictatorship Argentina could be generally understood as a crisis of national paradigms that, regardless of their political origins, had been weakened by their ineffectiveness to explain and justify the violence of the Dirty War and the socio-cultural transformations that affected the country. National discourses that defined Argentina and embodied a project for its future were mistrusted and, to some extent, deemed irrelevant. Ironically, this situation created the right circumstances for producing a social imaginary that allowed for the re-emergence and unprecedented popularity of the historical novel, a genre associated with a traditional perception of the world.

A Good Genre for Bad Times

According to Noé Jitrik (1995 16-19), who has developed a theoretical framework for understanding the historical novel in Latin America, the formation of a particular genre must be authorized by a social imaginary that is related to a situation of social, political and cultural imbalance, as, for example, a change in state organization from colony to independent country. Jitrik defines the social imaginary as an organized system of

intertwined texts and experiences that are manifested in expectations, demands and approvals given to certain cultural forms and denied to others. In the case of the historical novel, the emergence of the genre is closely related to times of radical change that forced a reformulation of the past in the popular imagination in order to explain, validate or oppose an unsettling present. The Argentinean and Latin American historical novel are not exceptional in this respect as the same may be said of them as of the emergence of the genre in other national or regional cultural contexts.

When the historical novel appeared in nineteenth-century Europe, it was precisely under the circumstances of a major shift in social imaginary related to the French Revolution and the secularization of life. Georg Lukács (23-24) notes that the historical novel surfaced at the beginning of the nineteenth century only because of deep and sudden transformations in popular consciousness triggered by the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars, and the rise and fall of Napoleon Bonaparte. Between 1789 and 1814, almost every country in Europe underwent more upheavals than in previous history. Armed conflicts occurred successively over a relatively short period of time which, according to Lukács, gave them a distinct nature: it made their "historical character" (23) far more visible than would have been the case for separate events. Lukács draws such conclusions because in post-revolutionary events he sees the birth of a massive historical consciousness to accompany social transformation and the rise of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, the warfare between 1789 and 1814 was unique not only due to its intensity but also to the character of the armies involved in the conflicts. The pre-revolutionary wars of the absolute states were fought with small professional armies and were conducted in such a way as to maintain some degree of isolation from the civilian

population. In order to defeat absolutist monarchies and their professional armies, revolutionary France created mass armies. Lukács concludes:

> If in place of the recruitment or pressing into professional service of a small contingent of the declassed, a mass army is to be created, then the content and purpose of the war must be made clear to the masses by means of propaganda. This happens not only in France itself during the defense of the Revolution and the later offensive wars. The other states, too, if they transfer to mass armies, are compelled to resort to the same means. (23)

To create and maintain mass armies, Lukács continues (24), European powers were forced to use propaganda, which, given that the wars occurred in succession, could not be limited to an isolated war but had to relate it to the social content, historical presuppositions and the circumstances of the struggle. Moreover, propaganda had to link the war to the life and possibilities of the nation's development, which resulted in a national and historical discourse[16]. This new sensibility to the historical was amplified by the unprecedented long-distance movements of mass armies which brought, among other less positive aspects, a broadening of horizons of the masses involved in military actions. Travel and contact with distant European cultures, previously experienced only by a few adventurous-minded individuals, became the mass experience of hundreds of thousands who traveled with the armies. Hence, the concrete possibility to comprehend the existence of individuals was perceived as something historically conditioned. As Lukács notes, the historical novel could emerge only because history became a mass experience and the idea of the nation was brought to the masses:

> In this mass experience of history the national element is linked on the one hand with problems of social transformation; and on the other, more and more people become aware of the connection between national and world

[16] Lukács extends his analysis to countries other than France and, as an example, shows the part that German literature and philosophy played after the battle of Jena (23).

> history. This increasing consciousness of the historical character of development begins to influence judgments on economic conditions and class struggle. (25)

Following Lukács's reasoning, the awakening of national sensibility was accompanied by the rise of a specific social consciousness. The historical novel emerged, therefore, from a need not only for national identity but for social identity as well as an effort to understand and legitimize the new world order. In this sense, the historical novel was, as Jitrik suggests (2005 83), a typical product of generalized anxiety about identity that materialized with Romanticism in the ever returning motif of origin in European literature of the time. The angst about the self at the level of the individual was expressed mostly in poetry and, at the social level, in the historical novel, which was linked to historicism, an explanatory system ideologically situated to affirm bourgeois dominance.

In Latin America, the social imaginary in the nineteenth century was shaped by events that were as world-shattering as the French Revolution was for Europe. The Wars of Independence, fought in the 1810s and 1820s, involved mass armies that traveled great distances, brought great instability and, more importantly, led to the rise of several sovereign nations. Nevertheless, the character and the social implications of these events were quite different from those of revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe. Due to its colonial status and other historical contingencies, Latin America lacked a strong middle class, so that its political revolution was not as closely followed by social change as in Europe. This aspect of the emancipation of Latin America is important in the light of Lukács's analysis of the historical novel and his location of class consciousness at the center of the rise of the new genre. Despite a long tradition of historical writing in Spanish literature, the historical novel in Latin America was an imported genre, but rather

than merely copying a literary form in vogue at the time, the Latin American historical novel expressed concerns that had a particular regional relevance.

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars brought a change from an absolutist state to a political organization that included new social classes. At the same time, Lukács states, the materialization of national consciousness was accompanied by a growing social awareness. In the case of Latin America the change in social structure was superficial in the sense that it did not involve deep social reforms. The rise to power of a new class in Europe could happen as the result of the influence in politics of the ideas of the Enlightenment and the development of a capitalist market. In Latin America, however, the impact of such ideas was rather limited. Writing about the political atmosphere in the wake of the Independence movement in Latin America, Tulio Halperín Donghi makes his skepticism quite apparent:

> For the most part, the ideological ferment of the Enlightenment had a less-than-revolutionary impact on political thinking in the Iberian world. New ideas advanced, during much of the century, in the context of scrupulous fidelity to the absolutist crowns that, in spite of all their vacillations, were themselves the leading forces for change. Most criticisms of the colonial order implied no rejection of the monarchy or the ideal of imperial unity, and, far from suggesting a total break with the past among the enlightened thinkers of both the peninsula and its New World colonies, devotion to the reformist sovereign appeared as a rationalized version of older, mystical conceptions of the monarch's role. (1993 43)

The Wars of Independence, although fought with the involvement of masses, were generated by quite different tensions caused by the conflict between the Spanish and Creole social and financial elites over political and commercial power. The Creoles could participate politically in the life of the colonies only to a limited degree and were always subject to non-American authorities, especially in matters of commerce, since they could

sell their products abroad only through the intermediary of Spanish officials and merchants who were appointed in Spain. In short, the Wars of Independence in the Latin American context had the objective of eliminating the peninsular "middleman" in politics and commerce.

The struggle for emancipation began as a revolt against the mismanagement of the colonies by a corrupt Spanish administration that was blocking local elites from prospering in a moment of growing economic possibilities. The Creoles considered their actions as a defense of the interests of the King of Spain and, despite the conflict with the representatives of the crown, the colonies did not question the authority of the Spanish Crown itself. The military conflict that eventually arose and ravaged the continent was a revolution of the Creole elites who wanted to replace the peninsular Spanish in their privileged position, yet, at the same time, were not interested in radical social reforms. As Halperín Donghi points out (1993 51), the political mobilization of the revolution involved only a tiny part of the population. This political elite was willing to allow limited access to power to other classes in the name of liberal reform but did not support any profound change in the foundations of political order that they hoped to inherit from the Spanish. The social transformations were only partial because, contrary to the French, British and American cases, where the modern state was erected on the basis of a revolution led by the bourgeoisie which was capable of creating an internal commerce and develop national industries that could integrate all social classes under its leadership, Latin America lacked such a politically motivated social group. The Wars of Independence opened Latin America to new markets but, as the politically active part of

the society owned land and produced primary goods for export, it had never seen the rise of a true middle class.

Once independence from Spain became a reality, the elites of the newly emancipated republics put a great effort into building new nations on the model of advanced countries such as England and France. The principles adopted were implemented, however, more as a "magic formula" than as a result of internal transformations needed for the existence and functioning of a modern state (González-Stephan 51). Access to the global market and symbolic goods caused only an illusion of belonging to the modern world while social reality and economic dependency remained the same as in colonial times. This situation caused a superposition of new European models over past colonial structures and had a deep impact on post-independence Latin America and its cultural formation.

The historical novel that emerged from the crisis of the Wars of Independence expressed the ambitions and preoccupations of the newly emancipated Creole elite and projected a vision for the future of the different Latin American nations. To a certain degree, the social imaginary that precipitated the rise of the historical novel in Latin America was utopian in nature because it was based on foreign models and was not, as Jitrik asserts (1995 45), socially required by a reading that did not exist or existed marginally. Not only was the level of illiteracy in Latin America very high at the time, but society was not yet democratic. This does not suggest that the historical novel was "false" or "inauthentic" but rather that it was the expression of the elite whose preoccupations where quite different than those of the European bourgeoisie.

In Europe, the reorganization of the world order caused by the French Revolution translated into formulations of social-class identity. Meanwhile, in Latin America the political instability related to the Wars of Independence invoked uncertainty about national identity (Jitrik, 1995 40-41). Independence was undoubtedly an event that shook the lives of the Spanish colonies in unprecedented ways. It triggered both a political and ideological rupture with structures created by Spain three centuries before. The world order established in the colonies not only had an administrative relevance but also served as a point of reference for local identities so that the end of dependence on the Spanish Crown provoked a political and cultural vacuum that was translated into anxiety at the individual and social levels.

Indeed, the transition from a reality governed by a king to an emancipated state was rather overwhelming. This sudden political and ideological change called for a reformulation of local identities and the subsequent articulation of new nationalities since, seemingly overnight, the inhabitants of Latin America stopped being Spanish and became Creole, a category that had not as yet had the time to be culturally conceptualized or mythologized. Thus, the shaping of an Argentinean or Chilean nationhood, for example, presented a challenge for the new political elite because it was difficult to justify new nationalities according to a traditional definition of the nation based on historical antecedents. The French, English, and Spanish could easily trace their origins for several centuries, which provided them with a sense of historical continuity. However, the newly emancipated states of Latin America did not consider their antecedents, whether Indigenous or Spanish, to be suitable. Jitrik writes about national identity in the early years of the republics as follows:

> Through its mechanisms [Latin American identity] seeks to discover not from whence it comes, but rather what it is in relation to other identities, since its identity is problematic, hazy, stigmatized, or at least composed of intermittencies. When this problem is linked to the idea of political independence, the criollo being something not clearly defined, an almost general stigma is spread over everything connected to the Indigenous world, that is, over a considerable part of the past, since it must be rejected in favor of the other experience, the colonial one, against which the idea of nation "in progress" emerges. (2005 83)

Unlike its European model, the Latin American historical novel was not engaged in the search for a social or class identity but for national legitimacy. The "general stigma" over the representation of the Indigenous world referred to by Jitrik in the preceding quotation defined the adaptation of the historical novel to the Latin American reality. The pre-colonial past did not appear as an attractive topic to be recovered and glorified in the historical novel because the Indigenous origins of the continent were not a part of the vision of the elite for the future of the nation. The elite were focused on building nations as sophisticated and civilized as those of the European powers. The Indigenous, who were perceived of as being inferior to Europeans, were by no means part of a constructed national identity at the time of the emancipation of the region. This tendency to exclude the Indigenous varied in different Latin American countries and evolved in time depending on the ethnic distribution of power. Mexico and Argentina, for example, found themselves in divergent positions. In the Mexican context the historical novel thrived in the nineteenth century and to a certain degree romanticized the Indigenous. In Argentina, however, the Indigenous past was omitted as a source of origin. Moreover, the government carried out a series of military expeditions called *La Guerra del Desierto* with the goal of physically annihilating the Indigenous population in order to open new lands for cultivation (see Halperín Donghi 2005)

At the same time, the colonial past was universally represented in negative terms because the new republics were built, at least in theory, in ideological opposition to its Spanish antecedents. For this reason, the pre-independence past is represented in the historical novel as the time of state abuses perpetrated by the peninsular Spanish, mismanagement of the colonies, and their intellectual and cultural backwardness. In the context of the emancipating nations in Latin America, the Indigenous appears not as the ancestor of new nations but as the victim of an oppressive system that the new reality condemned.

Since the remote past of the first inhabitants of Latin America was of little interest to the newly emancipated elites and the Spanish colonial heritage resulted incompatible with the vision of the future of the new nations, the historical novel turned its attention to more recent history. Ultimately, the Wars of Independence and the first moments in the life of the republics became the foundational time to which Latin America and Argentina looked for their origins. For this reason, some novels are considered historical despite the fact that they refer to events that engage and circumscribe the lives of their authors. Such is the case of *Amalia* (1855) by José Marmol (Jitrik, 2005 83), *Soledad* (1847) by Bartolomé Mitre (Unzueta 132) or even parts of *Facundo* (1845) by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (Katra 31-46). This "weak historiographical perception", as Jitrik terms it (2005 83), is characteristic of the Argentinean historical novel and persists in its contemporary form which remains in contrast to the traditional definition of the genre.

The particular development of the historical novel in Argentina, which conveniently allows the introduction of events contemporary to the author, raises theoretical problems about the relationship between the genre and history. When the

action of a novel takes place in a distant past in relation to the life of its author, the novel is automatically considered historical. Nevertheless, when the time of events refers to the author's own lifetime, then such a classification is more questionable. In short, the historical novel is a novel whose action is set in an historical time. Unfortunately, this definition, although far from false, encounters serious problems. Assuming that the notion of the novel, including its evolution from the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth, is commonly known, the term "historical", that identifies the genre, can be problematic. Logically, the word "historical" points to a certain relationship between the novel and the past while leaving unclear the question of what differentiates the historical novel from other novels set in the past. In most novels, after all, there is an element that is related, sometimes significantly, to history although this does not necessarily mean that they are all historical. In fact, Jitrik (2005, 87-88) points out that it is difficult to write something ahistorical as the historical perspective offers an understanding of the relationship between the individual and his/her milieu in the literary work.

Some critics like Avrom Fleishman (1971), Enrique Anderson Imbert (1952) and Seymour Menton (1993) who have written about the historical novel in general and in Latin America in particular propose to set some limits in order for a certain epoch or period of time to be considered historical in a novel. Fleishman excludes from the category of the historical novel all those novels that were set more recently than two generations earlier in time, Anderson Imbert (3) set the limit at the author's birth and Menton (17) adopted a similar limitation but added, notwithstanding, that those "novels in which the narrator(s) or characters are anchored in the present or in the recent past, but in which the principal theme is the re-creation of the life and times of a clearly distant

historical character" can be accepted as historical. Menton did not really have a choice but to include this note to his limitations of historical time in the historical novel. The topic of his monograph, after all, was the new historical novel in Latin America in which the inclusion of different chronological perspectives is a technique often used.

Without a doubt, it is helpful to set some chronological limit with respect to what might be considered historical both for the purposes of research and the formulation of an adequate definition of the historical novel, although, at the same time, this condemns the study of the genre to some subjective arbitrariness. Additionally, in the case of Argentina, this approach is questionable because, as mentioned earlier, it does not correspond to the particular literary tradition of the country, especially in the case of novels like *Amalia*, *Soledad* or even *Facundo* to which a more flexible definition must be applied. The need to have a more workable definition of the genre is also influenced by the last dictatorship and the necessity to historicize the not-so-distant past in order to be reconciled with it. Therefore, in an effort to avoid unnecessary randomness in the setting of limits for the genre and to include borderline novels that deal with the recent past, it is possible to approach the "historicity" of the historical novel in a way that does not depend on its temporal relation to the author but on its association with historical discourse. By setting time limits as a criterion for accepting or rejecting a novel as historical, Fleishman, Imbert and Menton simply set some practical limits to what Lukács refers as to the "specifically historical" that he considers to be the distinctive feature of the historical novel: "What is lacking in the so-called historical novel before Sir Walter Scott is precisely the *specifically historical*, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age" (19; my emphasis).

Since Lukács published his book about the historical novel in 1937, it is safe to assume that his concept of "the specifically historical" was derived from the view that the past/history is a movement in an immanent direction. Keith Jenkins remarks that this approach to history was characteristic of what he calls "the modernist project" in history that was manifested in two main versions, the bourgeois and the proletarian, that differed only in its ultimate destination, that is, the rise to power of the proletariat or the bourgeoisie (5). Both versions share a view that, through the explanation of origins, history legitimates the on-going present that appears to be the consequence of previous events leading naturally to a specific world order. In the case of Lukács, a Marxist scholar, a reference to such a concept was important and in a sense natural. He claimed that the distinctive feature of the historical novel in Europe was its relation to historicism, a vision of the past that emphasized social movements in the development of history and the rise of the bourgeoisie. The historical novel and its characters were perceived to be derived from this particular vision of the development of history.

Lukács's position was shaped, of course, by historical circumstances and his particular ideological inclination but the notion of "specifically historical" as the key concept that defines the historical novel should not be immediately disregarded. Under the influence of postmodernism, contemporary historiography puts into question universal and generalizing views about the past and sharply separates it from history: the past is the totality of events that took place in the period preceding the present; history, on the other hand, is the representation of events that happened in the past, carefully selected, and arranged according to their importance in order to form a coherent narrative

that aims to give meaning to our past and explain the present. Lukács' definition of the historical novel, therefore, can be adopted if by "specifically historical" it suggests the relationship between the historical novel and historical discourse. Such a view of Lukács's term liberates the interpretation of the historical novel from a strict relationship with one political or ideological bias, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and, for example, opens it up to other discourses related to historiography. For this reason it is necessary to clarify the definitions that will be used in this thesis. The terms "historical discourse" and "historiography" will be used to refer to the writings of historians that are backed by scientific research but are dependent on the official discourse of their time, be it political or ideological. History, on the other hand, refers to events that are described by historians.

When the past presented in a novel is distant, it is always historicized because the only way to access it, as much for the author as for the reader, is through historical discourse. The historical novel which is set in a distant past uses historiography by default as a point of reference whether or not it confirms, opposes or complements this discourse. In the case of novels where the action is more contemporary, historical discourse is subject to debate to an incomparably greater degree than with respect to novels that relate a more ancient past due to a lack of historical perspective. In order to be considered historical, such novels must somehow emphasize their connection to historical discourse which, in turn, may greatly depend on the interpretation of the reader. The confusion regarding novels more contemporary with the life experience of their author comes from the fact that the events described in those novels are not necessarily channeled through historical discourse and they often refer to collective memory which

treats the past in a unique and separable manner. To consider, then, any novel to be historical, regardless of whether it describes distant times or those contemporary with the life of its author, it is essential to point to the relationship between the novels in question and historical discourse.

The connection with historiography is manifested in various characteristics that set the historical novel apart from other genres. Two of them, mentioned by Jitrik (2005 88), are the reference to a moment considered to be historical and commonly accepted as such, and the documentary support conducted by whoever proposes this representation. The former characteristic refers us directly to the problematic outlined earlier: if an event is accepted collectively as historical it is so because it is represented in historiography. The latter characteristic is a direct consequence of the former because documents, especially written ones, are at the very core of history as a discipline. Effectively, writers of historical novels such as Martha Mercader (1991), often indicate in interviews and presentations that the creative process of writing their particular historical novel was preceded by a long, extensive and exhaustive research through historical documentation about a particular time or its historical protagonists. As Amadeo López remarks (1994 50), the coherence of situations and characters to history is dictated by the need of the reader to identify them as historical. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that the identification of historical events is synonymous with the historical knowledge of the reader that would allow him/her to measure the degree of correspondence between fiction and history. Rather, the identification of the related events as historical is based on the resonance that it provokes in the reader and makes him/her believe in the illusionary world s/he is about to enter. Whatever the objective of the historical novel, whether this is

moralizing, epistemological, mythical or political, the documentation is the cornerstone of the support that guarantees its verisimilitude.

Semantically, as Jitrik points out (1995 12), the historical novel is an oxymoron that refers to two separated and irreconcilable spheres. The objective of history is to tell the truth about the past; by contrast, the objective of a novel is to present a representation of the past that has, at least, a measure of coherence applicable only to the internal logics it aims to create. This, of course, does not mean that the novel, and by extension literature, is untrue but rather that the truth in historical discourse and the truth in the historical novel are just not at the same level of understanding. The novel does not reflect the past but rather provides an echo of its resonance that creates an illusion of the past that is ruled by the internal coherence of the text. In literature, the truth consists in making something credible. The goal of the historical novel, then, "is not to tell how things really happened or what their impact on the unfolding of human history was but rather how things could have happened" (López, 1994 60). The internal rules that make the illusion believable in literature depend in great measure on the genre and, consequently, will be different for a science fiction novel and, for example, a detective story. The rationality of the historical novel is related to the historical discourse that not only provides the atmosphere, the décor and its field of representation but, most importantly, is the foundation of the effect of verisimilitude. For this reason, the historical novel is bound to realism as a mode of representation because realism is perceived in historiography as the most objective form of narrative expression.

The historical novel evolved in Argentina not only in response to transformations in literature at large, but also following changes in historiography regardless of whether

or not they were caused by political bias or more subtle debates generated by the questioning of historical discourse as a transparent medium. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the postmodern turn in historiography had an impact on the historical novel in Argentina just as it did on culture in general. It is important to stress at this point, however, that the return of the historical novel and the innovations that were introduced at this time were not a direct and automatic consequence of the postmodern critique of Western historical discourse, which really concerned only Western Europe and North America. The form of the historical novel, its rise and return depended each time on a specific social imaginary that allowed certain literary forms to take shape under particular socio-cultural circumstances. The need to set, redefine or discuss the historical origins of Argentina in a literary form was undoubtedly generated by very real socio-political crises. It is clear that the last such emergency was caused directly by the 1976-1983 military dictatorship and the resulting questioning of national narratives rather than by theoretical discussions in the somewhat hermetic field of history. Nevertheless, the restoration of the genre could never have happened without the accompanying debate in the academic field of history regarding the representation of the past. With this discussion underway, the social imaginary opened to new problems and possibilities in history and in the literary genre most related to it. In other words, the historical novel in Argentina could not have blossomed in the way it did if not for a general discussion about historiographical representation of the past that arose in intellectual circles at a specific time.

To sum up, the historical novel is a genre that finds its articulation in a social imaginary in times of social or national crisis following reorganizations of the world

order which demand the redefinition and a new legitimization of origins. It is a genre closely related to historical discourse and is not immune to transformations that this discourse experiences. The development of the historical novel in Argentina can be divided into three main periods of change: the political formation of Argentina and the influence of the Liberals in the creation of national mythologies in the nineteenth century; the historical revisionism of the beginning of the twentieth century provoked by the reaction of conservative elites to the wave of mass immigration that was transforming the country; and the crisis of national and global narratives in the face of the disaster of the last dictatorship, the neoliberal crisis and the epistemological crisis in Western philosophy. As I will show in the following discussion, each of these periods presented the past in very distinctive ways.

The Politics of Exclusion

Nineteenth-century Latin American and Argentinean elites, especially those considered Liberal, rejected the Spanish heritage of Latin America for political reasons but at the same time were fascinated by Western Europe. This attraction extended from literature to virtually everything else that was created in the old continent (González-Stephan 42) and was dictated not only by the aesthetic preferences of the cultural elite but also by the fact that countries such as England and France were perceived as the center of modern civilization to which the new republics aspired to belong. To produce works of art which corresponded in their form to the European models was interpreted as a sign of belonging to the civilized world. Consequently, aesthetical variations of cultural forms developed in Europe were quickly adapted to Latin America. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Latin

American elites were closely attuned to European literary trends, the unstable political situation of the continent caused some delay in their application. The historical novel, a genre that emerged at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century in England, was already present in Latin America in translation since the 1830s (Pons 83), yet, due to the instability produced by the Wars of Independence and the civil wars that followed them, its local production and publication was temporarily delayed.

The local historical novel entered the literary scene in Argentina in the mid-nineteenth century with the publication of *La novia del hereje* (1854) by Vicente Fidel López. The appearance of the genre was relatively simultaneous to its corresponding emergence in other Latin American countries, but in Argentina the genre did not establish itself as a dominant literary form, as it did in Europe, nor was it as popular as in other Latin American countries. In a comparison of the number of historical novels written in Argentina with the number written in, for example, Mexico, the production of the genre in the former appears to be quite small. The search for national identity was undertaken predominantly not by the historical novel but by the political essay (Jitrik, 1986 42).

The lack of interest in the historical novel, which had the potential to be an avenue for creating a much needed national mythology, can be explained by a relatively "weak historiographical perception", as Jitrik calls it. One has to keep in mind that in the nineteenth century, the history of Argentina as a republic was quite young and the historical origins of the country did not fit easily with the vision of the elite for its future. If the historical novel has a role in reinforcing national identities it is because it refers to a mythological time in the formation or golden age of nations which reaffirms their hereditary right to an autonomous existence. Therefore, the difficulty that writers of

historical novels had to confront in Argentina was the time period that would be represented.

It was impossible to consider that the colonial period could be presented as the origins of the newly founded nation not only because Argentina was recently emancipated from Spanish dominance but also because the old kingdom was seen as an undeveloped country, unworthy of being the starting point for the bright future of a new and promising nation. Additionally, Argentinean intellectuals were reluctant to glorify their colonial history and conjure national origins from it because, unlike most Latin Americans, they felt no nostalgia for their past. This fact is relevant inasmuch as the development of the historical novel in the mid-nineteenth century in Latin America took place in an atmosphere of longing for the "good, old times". Halperín Donghi (1993 115-57) observes that after years of wars, Latin America was politically destabilized and inherited a highly militarized society that would haunt it for centuries to come. The local militias that fought against the troops loyal to the crown evolved into organized outlaws and made traveling and trade virtually impossible. This had a disastrous effect on the local economy that was already weakened by diminished ties to Spain and its commercial networks. The impact of nearly half a century of military activity and commercial discontinuity led Latin America to an economic crisis from which it would not recover until early in the twentieth century. The economic decline and the lack of civil security led to feelings of nostalgia toward colonial times. Sentiments such as this were especially vivid in Mexico because its mineral exports depended on Spain and its commercial networks and the new political order produced mostly a lowering of the elite's standard of living.

In Argentina, in contrast, there was no opportunity to cultivate such nostalgic sentiments among the Buenos Aires elite who produced literary works. Although travel routes were as insecure in Argentina as in the rest of Latin America, independence catalyzed unprecedented levels of international trade and local prosperity. Until that moment, international commerce was conducted clandestinely but was severely limited by Spanish regulations and the greater part of the profits ended up in the hands of Spanish-born officials. Therefore, the emancipation from Spain had a very palpable and quantifiable value. It was no surprise, then, that instead of reminiscing, the ruling class directed its attention to the future and to the possibility of a prosperous Argentina as it gained entrance into global markets.

As for the pre-colonial past in Argentinean literature, it was generally perceived as barbaric, hence its unsurprising absence from historical fiction. By contrast, in Mexico, the impressive Indigenous heritage present in popular traditions and, more importantly, in the monuments left by ancient empires provided authors with an inspiration similar to that of the Middle Ages for European romantics. In Argentina, however, Indigenous cultures did not leave traces that elevated them to the status of a great civilization, in the traditional European sense. Understandably, the Argentinean Creole elite did not even consider the Indigenous cultures to be the cradle of an idealized and modern country. In Mexico, the Indigenous element had to be included in the national mythology because of the demography of the country and the ethnic distribution of power. In Argentina such an imperative did not manifest itself because the Native sector of society was notoriously omitted from the national project represented in both history and literature.

The peculiarity of the historical novel produced in Argentina came, in effect, not only from the fact that it was set in exotic locations, but also from how it reflected a specific historiographical perception which, eventually, defined the particular traits of the genre and persisted in its subsequent forms. The historical novel in Argentina was not limited to works that inflexibly adhere to the general definition of the genre, especially in regard to the temporal distance between the events described in the text and the lifetime of the author. As mentioned earlier, certain nineteenth-century Argentinean novels that refer to times contemporary with the lives of their authors are seen by literary critics as, precisely, historical. More importantly, however, due to the circumstances that accompanied the emergence of the genre, the historical novel projected the principle of political exclusion in the representation of the past.

Fascinated with Western European countries, politicians and intellectuals like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Bartolomé Mitre, or Juan Bautista Alberdi articulated a vision of Argentina that was to be shaped according to European models which implied, among other things, a homogenous and uniformly Caucasian ethnic profile. Juan Bautista Alberdi, in his influential *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* (1852), presented a plan for the development of the country that was to be the base for the constitution of 1853. One of the main principles of this document, "gobernar es poblar", aimed at catalyzing the development of the country by means of European immigration. The new citizens from the so called civilized countries, were considered a guarantee of effective management of land and resources and also promised a genetically more "enlightened" offspring who would be the foundation for the future of a dynamic and successful nation. In other words, assuming that the historical novel in

Argentina had the same objectives as it had in England and France, it was difficult for local writers to look for inspiration in the distant past for the legitimization of the new order and the new nation.

The question of the "weak historiographical perception", therefore, does not stop at the presumed lack of acceptable historical antecedents for Argentina. Rather it involves the construction of history and national mythologies by the new elites in light of new political circumstances. Postmodern historiographical theories stress that history is a construct based on a conscious or unconscious selection of documented facts that are assembled in an explanatory narrative. The choice of facts and narratives, in addition to being dependent on paradigms of history as a discipline, is political and related to the vision of the historian for the future of the nation. The historical perception in Argentina was indeed weak in the sense that, as in other Latin American nations, it simply emerged as a reaction to its historical traditions. Therefore, the selection of elements of the past that could constitute a point of reference for a national mythology was restricted by emergent political visions.

The historical novel was dependent on this construction because of its generic relation to historical discourse and because many of the writers of these novels, such as Bartolomé Mitre, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, or Vicente Fidel López, were historians themselves and, at the same time, successful politicians. Thus, as the history of Argentina was in a process of unfolding, historical fiction was supposed to complement it. The stakes were high because the construction of the past would become the country's foundational narrative and the Liberal intellectuals took the responsibility of inventing its "true origins" with serious attention. Interestingly, in the mid-nineteenth century, the

Liberals were not yet in power and had to construct historical fiction to legitimize the new socio-political order which, though envisioned, did not yet exist. National history, therefore, was presented in historical novels in a manner that implied the development of events that would eventually lead to the domination of a political sector that, in turn, identified itself with the nation. This understanding of nation as corresponding to a particular political inclination was characteristic of the early years of Argentinean nationhood. Halperín Donghi comments on this subject:

> [The urban and rural masses] had appropriated a rich and complex political imagination, in which the image of the nation, while not completely ignored, had a more peripheral place than could perhaps be expected. The revolution has been waged in the name of the patria, but, while the term denoted both a nation and a political cause, it was the second that resonated more strongly with the masses. (2003 44)

It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that the historical novel was confirming claims of legitimacy of a particular political group in their effort to gain power.

The invention of Argentina and its origins through the form of the historical novel was not an easy task because the image of the future of the country that the Liberals had in mind was hardly compatible with any known type of historicism. Indeed, Argentinean liberals found themselves in a schizophrenic situation. On the one hand, they wanted mythological beginnings that could be easily fictionalized in historical novels, as was done in European countries, while, on the other hand, they completely ignored the Indigenous and colonial heritage from the national tradition. The Liberals were, in a sense, entranced by their idea of a utopian country, envisioned as being civilized and modern, and, accordingly, were constructing their national mythologies in line with this dream with little or no regard for traditions of the past.

As the vision of the Argentinean nation based on European immigration and modern European socio-political thought did not come "organically" from the Indigenous and colonial past of Argentina, the historical novel presented pre-independence history in a rather critical light (Jitrik, 1995 37-42). This unfavorable attitude towards the past differentiated the Argentinean historical novel from its European counterpart. Instead of searching for a positive legitimization of the new nation in some mythological past, as historicism attempted, the historical novel in Argentina presented colonial times by negatively emphasizing the inadequacy of the Spanish rule. In a sense, then, the early Argentinean historical fiction defined the nation negatively (what it was not) rather than providing a positive narrative from which a new nation could arise.

La novia del hereje o la inquisición en Lima by Vicente Fidel López, referred to colonial times precisely in this light. The novel tells the love story of a young criollo woman and an English captain who came to the New World with Sir Francis Drake's 1578 expedition. The cultural differences between the two protagonists generate a romantic drama set in colonial Lima. It is clear that by locating the action of the novel in this context, the author was not interested in finding the legendary beginnings of Argentina. Rather, as he explains in the introduction to the novel, he was trying to expose

> la lucha que la raza española sostenía en el tiempo de la conquista, contra las novedades que agitaban al mundo cristiano y preparaban los nuevos rasgos de la civilización actual: quería localizar esta lucha en el centro de la vida americana para despertar el sentido y el colorido de las primeras tradiciones nacionales. (25)

López, certainly, depicted the origins of a new American republic born from frustration and incompatibility with the Spanish tradition that was blocking the ideological and economic growth of its colonies. Interestingly, he was not trying to create the

mythological beginnings of the new entity, the *criollo*, through a construction of legendary protagonists who would represent the new national qualities. Rather, he presented the vague beginnings of something that would only come to full form in the future. His position was understandable; the heroes of Argentina, the country that existed only in the minds of a particular socio-political group, were to be elevated to the national altars after the Liberals gained power, and after the publication of this particular novel.

It is worth noting that López presents the struggle for an American life in a literary form that encapsulated the aspirations of the liberal elites and had a didactic purpose. The construction of *La novia del hereje* shows the characteristics of a national romance, as Doris Sommer calls it, a romantic story in which the protagonists represent specific political attitudes of nineteenth-century Latin American politics. This literary form was supposed to romanticize the new nations with a sentimental plot that would provoke feelings of sympathy towards the couple and, through the metaphor of their relationship, gain partisans for a specific political cause. The conclusion of novels such as this is an indication of the path the nation might choose in its development. Obviously in the case of *La novia* the choice of protagonists, a *criollo* woman and an English captain, was anything but coincidental. The girl symbolizes the new national entity, not Spanish but American, and, despite her young age, ready to be emancipated from her Spanish parents. She falls in love with none other than an Englishman, a Protestant, who, from the perspective of the time, symbolizes progress, a new mind set, and the principles that would become the foundation of a new world order in which Spain would be pushed to the margins. In other words, this male English protagonist represented everything that Spain could not provide for the New World and what the Argentinean elites wanted. The

fictionalized marriage of a *criollo* woman and the English captain would provide a scene that the Liberals dreamed about: Argentina, born in the new world from a civilized European father. Moreover, this dream, now a foundation, had nothing to do with their Spanish antecedents or, for that matter, the Native population.

López was very much aware of the shortcomings of his novel in the representation of a strictly Argentinean history, which he candidly expressed in the introduction to *La novia*, where he drew the rough plan of a historical novel that he should have written instead. The plot would be presented against the historical background of the struggle for independence of Argentina and the foundation of the nation. In other words, the unwritten historical novel that López was referring to would include times that he not only witnessed but also that he actively helped to shape. He might have failed in his efforts to write a historical novel that would include times he personally observed but others, like Sarmiento or Mitre, did not. Moreover, if López was promoting a liberal vision of the *criollo* and America which excluded the Spanish as the ancestors not only of Argentina but of the whole Latin American culture in a subtle way, his contemporaries, who wrote novels that included the modern history of Argentina, had a much clearer agenda.

La novia del hereje was first published in Chile in the issues 2 to 7 of *El Plata Científico y Literario* directed by Miguel Navarro Viola in the years 1854-1855. The fact that the first Argentinean historical novel was published in Chile and only years later in Argentina demonstrates the development of the genre. Most visions of the Argentinean past were produced from the bitterness of the exile to which the Liberals/Unitarians were condemned during the years of the dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas and this period

of time has had a predominant influence on the form of historical novels, even those that would be published when the Liberals finally gained power. The historical novels were providing leisure through an engaging plot yet had a very strong political agenda that shaped the genre. Seymour Menton concludes:

> In addition to entertaining several generations of readers with their thrilling episodes and their heroic and angelical protagonists pitted against fiendish, diabolical villains, the goals of most of these novelists were to contribute to the creation of a national consciousness by familiarizing their readers with characters and events of the past, and to bolster the Liberal cause in the struggle against the Conservatives, who identified with the political, economic, and religious institutions of the colonial period. (18)

The role of the historical novel in Argentina was dictated by the situation the Liberals/Unitarians found themselves in by the mid-nineteenth century. After the turmoil of the Wars of Independence came the time of civil wars that burst out among the *caudillos* of different provinces. The Conservatives, called Federalists in Argentina, were defending the autonomy of different provinces, and the Liberals, called Unitarians, were pushing for the dominance of Buenos Aires and a centralized government. The wars led to the eventual dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas who, conscious of the power of the press, took control of it and eliminated the voice of the Liberals/Unitarians from public debate. To bypass his prohibitions, the Liberals wrote and published while in political exile in Chile.

During the first years of Independence, Argentinean literature, including historical novels, was circulated by the Chilean press, together with articles and essays that were directly condemning the dictatorial regime in Buenos Aires and conservative political attitudes that allegedly originated in colonial Spain and stood in the way of progress. At the same time, the Liberals were establishing the ideological foundations for a future

republic under their leadership. Ironically, the formulation of the Liberals' views had traits that were as dictatorial as the values imposed by the Federalists. This should come as no surprise, as González-Stephan remarks (70-77). Indeed, it would be very difficult to track a sharp ideological difference between those two political groups. It is revealing, after all, that Rosas, a Federalist *caudillo*, established a dictatorship from Buenos Aires, against Unitarians whose goal was to subject the other provinces, economically and politically to the power of none other than Buenos Aires. Although the Liberals and the Conservatives were defining themselves in opposition to each other, the former as defenders of civilization, the latter as representatives of true Argentinean values, their social background and frame of mind were very similar. The common ground for both of those factions was the idea of excluding everything that did not correspond to their political views.

This exclusionist ideology that manifested itself in extreme ways and even included the physical annihilation of the opposition sounds familiar when one recalls the last dictatorship in Argentina. The ideological foundations of this political mentality of exclusion that would lead to national tragedies were laid in nineteenth-century political essays and literature through which it influenced Argentinean culture and, for years, determined the ways in which the political reality was imagined. It is needless to add that the representation of the past in the historical novel was particularly susceptible to this political bias as its goal was always to legitimize the righteousness of the political cause endorsed by a particular writer.

As mentioned earlier, a weak historiographical perception prevented Argentinean writers from using the ancient history of their lands as the basis for claims that would

support independence. In light of political conflicts after independence and a public need for an ideological confirmation of the new situation, literary production turned to the essay and novels in which the action was contemporary with the lives of the readers. Although several Argentinean nineteenth-century novels are considered by critics to be historical, despite the fact that they included times contemporary with the lives of their authors, the example chosen for commentary in this dissertation is probably the most unlikely. *Facundo* by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento is usually considered an essay rather than an historical novel, but it represents the political aspects of the genre in the most obvious way.

During his time of exile in Chile, Sarmiento, a very active political representative of the Unitarians, published his influential book *Facundo* in which he forged the notions of civilization and barbarism as the dichotomy that explains Argentinean, and, by extension, Latin American reality. For Sarmiento, civilization was represented by the Argentinean cities, especially Buenos Aires, where local and international intellectual and cultural life were thriving. The city was the hope of the new republic because it suggested elaborate universal principles that, if applied, would make Argentina one of the leading countries of the world. Unfortunately, in the way of progress and civilization stood the rural which was populated by the uneducated, rough and barbarian *gauchos* who, as Sarmiento asserts, had a particular predisposition to violence and the potential to form feared armies, ready to destabilize the country at any moment. Sarmiento analyzes the *gaucho* in a very colorful and detailed way explaining the origins of the rural population, their education as horsemen and their uncanny agility, but has no reservation in emphasizing their spiritual shallowness, lack of discipline, disregard for any type of

authority and low morality. In the *gaucho*, he saw the curse and the inevitable failure of Argentina in its aspirations to unquestionable greatness and advocated the assimilation of the inhabitants of the interior to the norms of the city.

Facundo, as mentioned earlier, is an essay. However, the part that refers to the life of Juan Facundo Quiroga, the historical figure, is considered by William H. Katra to be a historical novel on account of "author's fictionalized treatment of historical material" (31). Quiroga, a well known *caudillo* of La Rioja province, lived on in the memory of the impoverished interior of Argentina as the highest and most representative example of its society. Sarmiento's objective, Katra points out (35), was to discredit in the eyes of his contemporaries one historical text that glorified this individual and replace it with a fictionalized account that emphasized his barbarian character and deeds. By replacing memory with an aesthetically attractive text, Sarmiento was obviously constructing and disseminating a desirable image of nationality and *patria*, following the practice of many Argentinean writers of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century (Sommer, 1986 47-73). The Argentina that Sarmiento, together with his ideological allies, was building, was not only, as in *La novia del hereje*, a country without the Indigenous and the Spanish antecedents but also a nation with a very distinguished social and political profile that did not tolerate the *gauchos* and their *caudillos*. Sarmiento, then, did not aim to picture an epistemological truth. Instead, he was aware of the mythmaking power of his prose that had the potential to shape the nation. In this respect, as Katra explains, *Facundo* is a paradigmatic example of an historical novel that was used by the elite in its "struggle to liquidate the political, ideological and artistic heritage of an historical period in decline" (39).

Sarmiento's vision persisted unchallenged until the beginnings of the twentieth century in part because of its aesthetic merits, but most importantly because in *Facundo*

> he foresaw the inevitability of the gaucho's disappearance, the displacement of the caudillo leadership, in the interior provinces, and the eventual ascension of liberalism – in its dependant variant – to the status of official doctrine of his country's ruling circles. In this light, it can be argued that whereas *Facundo* was deficient in objectivity depicting the historical past, it was entirely successful in capturing – in its "deep" reading of – the history of its country's future. [...] Sarmiento's realism was in relation to the future, [...] the ideals and expectations of his "civilized" [...] reader, and not in relation to the values of his "barbaric" countryman in the interior (Katra 37)

The historical novel in Argentina in its beginnings presented, then, a vision of the past that was exclusionary. According to those historical fictions, to be Argentinean meant to belong to a very specific historical heritage that aspired to an image created after European models. The mythmakers of Argentina, who happened to be mostly Liberal/Unitarian, rejected traditions symbolically and politically. After independence, for example, the Spanish inhabitants of Argentina were supposed to wear colored ribbons to distinguish them from the rest of the population. This segregation had, of course, legal consequences as the Spanish did not have the same rights in the Republic as the Creoles. The idea of political segregation and exclusion continued and manifested itself during the conflict between the Unitarians and Federalists when both parties were identified by different colors and aimed to eliminate their political rivals. It is not surprising that competing political parties wished to eliminate their opposition but, in the case of Argentina, the political preference was translated into national participation (Halperín Donghi, 2003 38). In other words, to be Argentinean, meant to be either Unitarian or Federalist, as both parties used exclusion as the basis of their ideologies. As for the Indigenous population of Argentina occupying the territories that were to be populated by

new settlers from the civilized countries of Europe, it was systematically exterminated during the presidency of the best educated and most worldly president of Argentina to date, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento.

The historical genre in Argentina, at least in its classical form, could not flourish under the circumstances described above. The disorientation caused by the change from colony to independent republic opened the social imaginary to new literary forms such as the historical novel but due to a particular historical perception the origins of the nation, unlike in Europe, were not an obsession. In fact, they could not have been, because the Argentinean intellectual elite were not interested in the poor foundations that history was offering the new nation and shifted their focus to future aspirations. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to note the influence of European historical novels in translation on the formation of a national identity in Argentina. Taking the favorable reception of European values into account, it would not be surprising for the historical novel from the old continent to replace a more developed local production in the national psyche not only as literary works but also as a point of reference for national identity in a country that never got comfortable with its classification as Latin American.

The exclusionist and highly political representation of the past that was formulated in nineteenth-century historical fiction survived political and ideological changes in Argentina. By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, liberal politicians and their politics of civilizing Argentina through the assimilation of the *gaucho*, the extermination of Native peoples and aggressive immigration policies that aimed to attract a massive European population found outspoken critics among the very same elite that had been attracted to European ideals in the first place. In particular, the

impact of immigration and the following dynamic development of the cities, Buenos Aires being the most outstanding example, put the heritage left by the Liberals in perspective. The fascination with European models was replaced by a glorification of values and traditions that were truly Argentinean and, to use Sarmiento's rhetoric, the national attention moved from civilization to the barbarism that suddenly became not only noble, but also authentically Argentinean.

In order to change the image of Argentina in the social imaginary from modern European-like to authentic, it was important to reconsider and reformulate the origins of the nation. The historic discrepancies among the elite concerning the future of the country and its political organization were resolved by force and, only then, strengthened by a historical discourse and literary fiction. This discourse included the educational system that glorified Argentinean heroes of independence and corresponded to a particular political profile. As the outcome of the dominant political tradition became debatable, the representation of the past underwent scrutiny and reflected the elite's new fascinations. In history, this tendency started a school of thought known as revisionism that had its respective form in historical fiction, especially in the works of Manuel Gálvez. Nevertheless, the reformulation of the past, as much in the field of history as in literature, maintained the exclusionary logic in the official discourse set by the Liberals. The Liberals' fascination with European culture and the consequent efforts of the elite to modernize the country according to models set across the Atlantic were replaced by the exploration of Argentinean traditions and the glorification of patriotic attitudes that opposed European influence.

The wave of European settlers who arrived in Argentina at the turn of the century provoked socio-political changes as dramatic as the national emancipation had turned out to be a century earlier, mostly because it had consequences that the Liberals did not anticipate in their utopist visions. European immigration was supposed to level internal differences in Argentina to a common Caucasian denominator, but, to the horror of the elite, it generated further social, cultural and political diversification of the country. Not only was Europe not that sophisticated but, instead of bringing the kind of civilization that Sarmiento and Alberti dreamed about, it introduced the newcomers' customs, languages, religions, and values that were different if not incongruous with Argentinean traditions. In the long run, the transformations generated by immigration changed Argentinean urban culture and led to the evolution of the political system and the democratization of the entire society (Halperín Donghi, 1993 188-91).

Although changes were probably inevitable and propelled Argentina into the realm of modern, industrialized countries, the local elites felt threatened by the immigrants and their culture and, consequently, made an effort to reaffirm their Spanish origins in a way that differentiated the elites from the new Argentineans and could guarantee the survival of their traditions. In the middle of the cosmopolitan migratory wave in Argentina flourished a very traditional historical novel that aimed to glorify Spanish heritage. In fact, demographic changes at the turn of the century inspired various historical genres, such as the historical drama, for example *Juan Facundo Quiroga* (1906) by David Peña, and the historical song and poetry such as "La pulperâ de Santa Lucía" or "La canción de Amalia" by Hector P. Blomberg.

As Alfredo Rubione points out (271), historical fictions produced at that time could be divided in two groups: the first was represented by Enrique Larreta, Roberto J. Payró, Hugo Wast, Carlos M. Noel, and Manuel Mujica Laínez, whose literary production was centred on colonial times, between 1516 and 1810, whereas the second group, represented by Paul Groussac, David Peña, Hector P. Blomberg, J. Cobos Daract, Arturo Capdevila, and Manuel Gálvez focused on the nineteenth century, especially on the times of the Rosas dictatorship.

The sudden turn to Spanish heritage, so distant from the cosmopolitan present of Argentina of the time, could be explained by the influence on Argentinean literature of the modernist movement led by Rubén Darío (who had, by the way, spent some time in Buenos Aires), and his fascination for the esthetic heritage of Spain and its language. But, as Alfredo Rubione emphasizes (273), the outburst of historical fiction at the turn of the century, like the *hispanismo* movement as a whole, has to be perceived predominantly as a conservative cultural response of the elite to immigration. Writing about the pre-immigration history of Argentina was an attempt at protecting its memory and its language from the foreign elements that were ruthlessly invading the country and its culture. The first group of historical novels that referred to colonial times and/or Spanish history, such as *La Gloria de Don Ramiro* (1908) by Enrique Larreta, emphasized the connections between Argentina and Spain, genealogies, and the roots of histories and historical characters that all suggested a cultural continuity between Spain and Spanish America. The exploration of historical themes that, until then, were forgotten or omitted by literature and historical discourse took as its objective the need to separate the true Argentineans from those recently arrived by means of a newly reconfigured genealogy

and was as exclusionary as the narratives produced by the Liberals. The difference now consisted in the fact that to be Argentinean one had to have Spanish antecedents and speak Spanish.

The second group of historical writers, the ones who concentrated on the nineteenth century, recovered and reconsidered the formative period of modern Argentinean history in opposition to Liberal historiography. As the transformations provoked and supported by the Liberals led to the overwhelming wave of Eastern European, Italian and Jewish immigration, the menace of anarchism, socialism and communism, and the apparent endangerment of the authenticity of Argentina, writers like Manuel Gálvez and Leopoldo Lugones glorified the conservative leaders of the interior who, although militarily defeated, represented the foundational values of Argentina. In this respect, the historical novel of the turn of the twentieth century represents Argentinean historical revisionism. This school of thought began in earnest in 1868 with the publication of *Historia de Rosas* by Manuel Bilbao, and was developed further by historians Adolfo Saldías and Ernesto Quesada and consolidated by revisionist historians between 1910 and 1930, such as Ricardo Rojas, José Luis Busaniche, Emilio Ravignani, David Peña, and others (Rubione 282-83). These writers claimed that nineteenth-century official history had been falsified, the events misinterpreted and national realities unrecognized. According to the revisionists, behind the official hegemonic discourse there was a different history of the country and it was imperative to unveil it through historical investigation because it contained an alternative project for Argentina, different from the one they were subjected to and its heroes, martyrs and ideas, if interpreted adequately, could be an inspiration for the present. The revisionists, then, examined the period of the dictatorship meticulously

and came to the conclusion that Rosas, despite his deficiencies, was the true father of the nation. He resisted foreign interventions and maintained the integrity of the territory in times of political turmoil. His abuses of the liberties of the citizens actually led to the integration of Argentina and could therefore be forgiven.

The re-evaluation of Rosas's rule led to reformulations of civilization and barbarism that replaced those notions with others that opposed indianism and exoticism (Rubione 278-82). In Sarmiento's elaboration of the dichotomy civilization and barbarism, being patriotic meant supporting civilization because it was understood as the positive force that guaranteed the progress of the country and its unity. In order to achieve this outcome it was important to follow European, thus foreign, models. Barbarism, on the other hand, symbolized forces that were opposed to the organization of the modern state of Argentina and was therefore seen as negative and unpatriotic. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, Sarmiento's rhetoric was reversed. Indianism, which would likely be considered synonymous with barbarism in his terms, consisted in the glorification of Argentinean values represented by the Spanish language and the heritage of the provincial *caudillos* and their *gauchos*. The foreign elements that were glorified by Alberti and Sarmiento in the name of civilization were disdained as unpatriotic. In a way, Indianism was similar to nationalism in politics and was presented as an integral part of the Argentinean spiritual autonomy which would manifest itself in legislation that forbade exotic immigration and sought to defend and conserve truly Argentinean traditions (Larrain 89-100).

These revisionist ideas were probably best represented in the historical novels written by Manuel Gálvez. In his *El diario de Gabriel Quiroga* (1910) and in the seven

novels of the *Escenas de la época de Rosas* the Federalists are the true heroes of the nation who defend its values against foreign influences represented by the Europeanized and, eventually, unpatriotic Unitarians. Gálvez emphasizes the role of the *caudillos* and the *Montoneros*, Federalist guerrillas composed by *gauchos*, in the creation of the new national identity through historical fiction. Unlike his predecessors, though, he admires and glorifies the rural traditions and perceives them not as barbarian, but as unique and appropriate for the country. In Gálvez's novels, the true Argentinean spirit survives in the provinces which maintain its distinctive character despite the foreign models forced upon the nation by the Unitarians. It is not surprising, then, that the time of the rule by Rosas, a *caudillo* and a Federalist, is presented as a period of affirmation of a national tradition, order and hierarchy. It is the time of the lost paradise of Argentina, built on the country's true origins and ideals which were almost destroyed by Liberal policies.

Such an interpretation of the past was obviously political because it questioned the Liberal national mythology and its Unitarian traditions. By retrieving and glorifying the history of the vanquished, Gálvez and other revisionist writers were questioning the legitimacy of the claim that it was necessary to be Liberal and Unitarian in order to be Argentinean. The revisionists, therefore, attempted to re-invent the country by imposing traditions contrary to those of the Liberals.

The efforts of revisionist historians and literary writers should not be interpreted, however, as an attempt to broaden national traditions by integrating a forgotten past into the national discourse. Rather, the meticulous historical investigation which led to a new perspective on the past had the replacement of official history as its objective on the basis of claims that revisionists held to be true. In other words, history as told by the Liberals

was perceived by revisionists as false and this, in turn, provided the Argentinean elite with arguments against policies that favored immigration. Confronted with the overwhelming reality of cultural changes that accompanied the modernization of the country, the liberal project of a modern nation enriched by newcomers and based on European civilization was eventually understood as anti-Argentinean. This criticism of the liberal philosophy, Rubione remarks (284), especially the claims about what is and what is not Argentinean, became the cornerstone for radical political thought, whether of the left or of the right, which ultimately led to violent confrontations and bloody regimes.

The production of historical novels in Argentina, either in the nineteenth or twentieth century, was characterized by an exclusionism that was related to a very specific epistemological model based on the idea of one truth that explained the past and pointed towards the future of the nation. The model for such a presentation of the past in historiographical or literary form was not only characteristic of Argentina, but reflected a philosophical approach to knowledge in the Western world. The combination of Western epistemological principles with the exclusionary political visions endorsed by Argentinean elites produced historical fictions that certainly provided unifying national discourses, but at the price of eliminating from the national project the possibility of plurality and diversification that had characterized the region from the very beginning. Moreover, since those narratives were to remain in the culture for years, they were used to legitimize state violence against the Indigenous people and against the politically weak who could always be labeled non-Argentinean.

This logic of exclusion is not of course limited to history and literature. It provided the rules on which the notion of "subversive elements" was built and elaborated by the

infamous General Jorge Rafael Videla (Lewis 133). Regardless of how we see the historical or ethical calculation undertaken by the general, however, it is important to stress that Videla was able to isolate a part of Argentinean society in spite of the extreme ideological diversity of the group to which he was referring. A pre-existing logic elaborated in Argentinean national fictions allowed him to label the group as if it were unified. He was not the only one to do so, and his political enemies from the left, as José Pablo Feinmann reports, were constructing their ideologies in the same exclusionist and radical manner as manifested in their embrace of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's unforgiving slogan: *Patria o muerte*. Ironically, one of the most widely known revolutionaries in the world, whose goal was to start many Vietnams and bring the power to the people, was Argentinean too.

The Novel of Inclusion

As already mentioned, the historical novel resurfaced in Argentina at the end of the twentieth century in light of a major socio-political crisis triggered by the military dictatorship. Although this was not the first crisis in Argentinean history that had an influence on the historical novel, it should be emphasized that it had an exceptional influence on the genre.

The impact of previous socio-political transformations, generated by the emancipation of Argentina from Spain and by a wave of non-Hispanic immigration related to the industrialization of the country, was felt primarily in a radical change of perspective on the national past in light of new political circumstances which, in turn, forced reformulations of history in accordance with the elite's new political goals. In both

those instances, official history was perceived as inaccurate by authors of historical novels who replaced it with another version of the past which was presented as the true account of national tradition. Since the reformulations of historical discourse in fiction were founded on the same exclusionary paradigms that characterized nineteenth and twentieth century historiography, the Latin American historical novel was also based on the belief in the existence of a single and objective truth (Pons 16). The revisions of history advanced the claim of being the true account of the past and the discourse that was questioned was discarded as untrue. Thus the historical novel suggested that the political order based on the false account of the past should be rejected as illegitimate and those groups that could not, accordingly, trace their origins to the new formulations of the national past should be automatically excluded from the national project. Such was the crisis brought on by the last dictatorship, however, it put into question not only a particular perspective on national history but also historical discourse as a transparent medium able to legitimize one group over others.

As mentioned earlier, the historical novel is an oxymoron that refers to two separate spheres: history, which is a narrative based on claims about truth, and fiction, a narrative which responds to the rules of verisimilitude. In the case of the historical novel, the internal rules that guarantee the coherence of the text are in close relation to historical discourse: they refer to the events described in history, use realism as an aesthetic medium and concur with or oppose official history. Recently, however, the idea of narrative, as both an epistemological tool and fiction, has come to be acknowledged in many discussions of theory as a human construct that is never natural or given. Linda Hutcheon observes:

> Whether it be in historical or fictional representation, the familiar narrative form of beginning, middle, and end implies a structuring process that imparts meaning as well as order. The notion of its 'end' suggests both teleology and closure and, of course, both of these are concepts that have come under considerable scrutiny in recent years, in philosophical and literary circles alike. The view of narrative that so much current theory challenges is not new, but it has been given a new designation: it is considered a mode of "totalizing" representation. (59)

The term "totalizing" that Hutcheon employs refers to the process by which writers of history, fiction or theory render their material coherent, continuous and unified. This means that the narratives used in non-fiction cease to be perceived as natural and transparent media through which an objective truth can be reached. On the contrary, they might correspond to the same rules of coherence as fiction. Although changes in historiography had already had an impact on the historical novel[17], this recent shift had unprecedented implications not only for the academic field of history but also on the historical novel that turned its attention to history as a structure that implies a meaning that is worth discussing rather than as a mere source of inspiration.

This change in the perception of history had a profound influence on the historical novel in Latin America. As María Cristina Pons comments (16), the Latin American novel of recent years is characterized by a critical revision and demystification of the past which calls for a re-writing and reformulation of history. This process includes an analysis of historical events that is accompanied by mistrust towards official historical discourse in its various versions. Some historical novels examine the very possibility of knowing and reconstructing the historical past, others recover silenced versions of history, and yet others present the past that was historically documented from a different

[17] Elisabeth Wesseling in her monograph *Writing History as a Prophet* examines the influence of historiography on historical fictions in Europe and North America from the nineteenth century to the present day.

and unfamiliar perspective. According to Pons (16), some novels are based on historical documentation in order to confirm that what has been narrated has a basis in history yet, at the same time, they question official discourse by introducing events that hitherto had been considered marginal. In other examples, historical novels are characterized by an overwhelming number of improbable but documented historical facts that are presented together with plausible but totally fictitious events. In yet other cases, it is emphasized that it is impossible to resort to documented sources to formulate a discourse about the past because the sources were erased or are impossible to decipher, or because the historical novel questions the validity of historical research based on written documents. Moreover, Pons continues (17), the contemporary Latin American historical novel shows a tendency to present the anti-heroic and anti-epic side of history, and concentrates on national defeats and failures rather than on times of glory. These characteristics are endorsed, moreover, by a number of narrative strategies: the absence of an omniscient and totalizing narrator; the inclusion of several narrative voices and different forms of discourse; the creation of the effect of improbability; the use of irony, parody and the burlesque; and the use of narrative strategies and self-reflexive forms that emphasize the literary character of all texts and the reconstruction of the past that is based on it. Pons concludes:

> De esta manera la novela histórica contemporánea cuestiona la verdad, los héroes y los valores abanderados por la Historia oficial, al mismo tiempo que presenta una visión degradada e irreverente de la Historia. Cuestiona, además, la capacidad del discurso de aprehender una realidad histórica y plasmarla fielmente en el texto, y problematiza no sólo el papel que desempeña el documento en la novela histórica sino también la relación entre ficción e historia. (17)

Latin American historical novels therefore show certain similarities with what Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafictions" (69), which are self-conscious about the paradox of the totalizing yet partial act of narrative representation. They overtly deconstruct received notions about the process of representing the actual in narrative and trace the processing of events into facts by exploiting and undermining the conventions of historiographic reference. This implies that history constructs its object, events become facts and both do and do not retain their status outside language. This is what Hutcheon calls "the paradox of postmodernism" (75): the past really exists but we can only know it today through its textual traces, such as documents, archives, photographs, paintings, architecture, films and literature that all depend on interpretation. The relativity of history, however, does not derive from the relativity of the past, since events either took place or did not, but on the relativity of our knowledge about it that is always subject to interpretation and contextualization. Historiographic metafictions question not only the totalizing nature of history but also the totalizing nature of fiction and opt for literary forms that are open. Meanwhile, the historical novels in Argentina that question historiography do so not only through the so-called new historical novel, which is characterized by the formal features described above, but also through the classical form of the historical novel.

The difference between historical metafictions and the historical novel in Latin America originates in the applications of the idea of Postmodernity. The reformulation of history in combination with literary forms other than the historical novel, which, as seen from our commentary in the previous chapter, is closely related to historiography, does not necessarily belong to Postmodernity. *Cien años de soledad* by Gabriel García

Márquez constitutes an excellent example of how misunderstandings arise. Hutcheon considers this novel to be a historiographic metafiction and therefore to be postmodern. Latin American Postmodernity, however, does not consist in the rejection of forms that characterized modernity but rather in their analysis and reformulation. *Cien años de soledad*, like most novels to which the label "magical realism" is attached, is based on oral traditions of storytelling in order to propose an alternative and original way of narrating the national past that would be accepted and acclaimed by the West and the North. This unique voice from Latin America is considered to be the highest achievement of Latin American Modernity because it found recognition within the logic of the aesthetic of Western civilization (in the form of a Nobel Prize for García Márquez) with which Latin America identifies. In other words, García Márquez's famous novel does not question Latin American Modernity but formulates an original Latin American voice within its limits.

The historical novel of the turn of the present century, on the other hand, re-examines discourses that were implemented to realign Latin America and Argentina with Modernity but, instead of rejecting their totalizing form, they deconstruct it. Historical discourse is criticized because it was misused and led to social pathologies that were manifested in the abuses of dictatorial regimes. However, the idea of a discourse that can formulate and organize the nation has not been discarded. Argentina, despite its many problems, still wants to achieve its Modernity and now, because of the devaluation of Modernity in the centers of Western civilization, the failure of its applications in the South, and the extent to which modernization has been pursued through education and mass media (radio, TV, and lately the Internet), it can do so on its own terms.

Undoubtedly, the historical novel produced during and after the dictatorship in Argentina not only discusses the content of history but how it was constructed. The rejection of politically totalizing narratives questions the politics of exclusion upon which historical discourse was based in Argentina. Following the logic of Postmodernity, the discourse elaborated in the new historical novel, should be characterized by its inclusivity as a response to the totalizing exclusion of the past forms. This hypothesis is confirmed by the formal changes experienced by the genre as enumerated above. The lack of an omniscient and totalizing narrator and the multiplicity of narrative perspectives, together with a preoccupation for representing marginalized voices, lead to an inclusionary vision of the past. Questions persist, however, about how such a vision coexists with the condition of Argentina during the time of the post-dictatorship and, if not in an exclusionary manner, how the past should be formulated. In the chapters that follow our intention is to present different formulations of national history in the historical novel and establish the principles of a possible national discourse that those narratives propose.

Chapter III

Remembering the Forgotten:

La tierra del fuego by Sylvia Iparraguirre

Absent Nations

> Argentina is the only country in Latin America that has determinedly and successfully erased the mestizo, Indian, and black minorities from its history and reality. They have been omitted from national narratives and, in the early twentieth century, were purposely made to disappear from even census figures. In contrast to the rest of the continent, Argentina's minorities have been erased from even collective memory: today no one seems to notice that in this white country there must always be a child in blackface in patriotic school plays or that the Indians are represented as some few nomads in the remote historical role of devouring the first Spanish conquistadors who dared approach their shores.
>
> (Susana Rotker)

The inclusive representation of the past offers many challenges related as much to the reexamination of narratives belonging to the dominant discourse of the nation as to the principle of insertion. The fictionalization of the past in the new historical novel in Argentina therefore entails the recuperation of history through its narration from the perspective of social groups hitherto omitted from official historiography, that is, groups such as women, the lower social classes, and ethnic minorities. Thus, a number of historical novels produced in the last thirty years or so re-write national history by taking into account groups that were consciously rejected or merely subsumed in official discourse. *Juanamanuela mucha mujer* (1980) by Martha Mercader, for example, retraces

the period of conflict between Unitarians and Federalists in nineteenth-century Argentina from the perspective of a woman writer, Juana Manuela Gorriti, whose family was divided between both factions; *Río de las congojas* (1981) by Libertad Demitrópulos presents the colonization of Argentina and the wars with Indigenous people in the seventeenth century from the point of view of a *mestizo* private in the army; and, in *El entenado* (1983), Juan José Saer endeavors to recuperate the voice of Indigenous people from the region of the River Plate who came in contact with the first Europeans to set foot there. Yet, the retrieval of forgotten memories also entails a different type of inclusion, one that consists in reexamining official history in order to de-mystify it, as Andrés Rivera sought to do in *El amigo de Baudelaire* (1991), by shifting the focus of narration about the nineteenth century to topics not considered by traditional historiography and focusing on the biological urges of his protagonists. *El largo atardecer del caminante* (1992) and *Los cuadernos de Praga* (1998) by Abel Posse are other examples of this kind of inclusion in that both novels are re-readings of historical documents intended to explore known events on the basis of other, hypothetical occurrences that did not find their way into documented history. While some historical novels explore both aspects of inclusion, the history of the underrepresented, as well as neglected perspectives, I shall deal only with the first type of inclusion in this chapter and deal with the second later.

The recovery of a forgotten past is an interesting concept from a theoretical point of view, but is sometimes difficult to achieve in practice. The politics of exclusion dominated Argentinean politics throughout history and led, in some instances, to the extermination of peoples and their cultural heritage. Certain obstacles arise when

searching for the appropriate sources needed to create an historical fiction intended to represent the point of view of groups excluded from Argentinean history. Although the reconstruction of the perspective of nineteenth-century women is possible from a study of diaries, letters, and other writings by women of that period, a comparable reproduction of the perspective of Indigenous nations is especially challenging because their cultures did not leave written artifacts that could be used by contemporary writers. The only widely accessible vision of the Indigenous that can be recreated has often been based on European, mostly Spanish, chronicles that described America using an imaginary corresponding to what René Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini (1992) have called the "legacy of Columbus". Such an imaginary has determined the dynamics between Europeans and Amerindians for five centuries.

Christopher Columbus, in the diary of his first voyage edited by Bartolomé de las Casas, presents the New World through structures that belong to the age of the novel of chivalry which was popular in Spain at the time of the discovery of America. Upon his arrival in the Caribbean, Columbus was confronted with cultures that he failed to perceive as alternative, viable civilizations. Instead, he constructed an image of the Other that reflected the fears and obsessions of a European mind in order to describe and understand them. At the moment of his encounter with the Amerindians the fantastic literary world of sorcerers, monsters, and mermaids that were known in the time of Columbus from novels such as *Amadís de Gaula* became the blueprint for the creation of the American Other and had an immediate political and social consequence, as Jara and Spadaccini have noted:

> The projection onto Amerindian reality of the images that the Europeans had of their own Other was a favorite discursive strategy. Perhaps the central axis in the medieval European imaginary relative to the embodiment of its own Other is that of savagery versus nobility. In the extremities of this axis one finds the figurations of the Noble Savage and the Wild (Wo)Man. Columbus, however, could perceive only the mercantile advantage and profit in this Other who was not European. Accordingly, his first presupposition was the inferiority of the Natives. Their beautiful nakedness unleashed in his mind a chain of figurations: technological backwardness, hence docility; absence of weapons, hence no defense; lack of religion, hence suspicion of bestiality. In the Admiral's mind, that simple signifier, nakedness, which in the mind of the Natives was an adequate response to the Guanahani's weather, transformed the Amerindians into creatures fit for captivity and serfdom, into commodities to be used for the European's profit. (11-12)

The "legacy of Columbus" had an enormous influence on writings from the New World. As Jara and Spadaccini emphasize, it determined the representation and perception of Indigenous people for centuries. The concepts forged by Columbus in regard to the American Native as the "Noble Savage" or "Wild Man" became a powerful image that still haunts the popular imagination, as is all too obvious even in recent movies such as Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto* (2006).

Although it is possible to recreate the reaction of the Spanish to Indigenous people from available sources, it is a challenge to know how the Natives saw themselves and how they perceived the conquerors at the time of the encounter, especially if the culture in question left no written or documentary artifacts[18]. The account of the voyage of Juan Díaz de Solís in 1516 in the previously mentioned *El entenado* by Juan José Saer exemplifies this problem. The novel narrates the story of a cabin boy who accompanied

[18] The case of Argentina is quite different from Mexico, for example. As Miguel León Portilla confirms in *Crónicas indígenas: visión de los vencidos*, the Indigenous people of Mexico have left chronicles in the form of pictographic texts and testimonies of the conquest. Mayan Codices and the *Popol Vuh* are yet other examples of Indigenous writings. In Peru there were also writings like *El Primer Nueva Coronica y Buen Gobierno* by Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala that described the situation of the Indigenous people under Spanish rule. In Argentina, however, there are no indications of the survival or existence of such texts.

Solís' expedition to the River Plate and was taken captive by local Natives. In captivity, he witnesses the life of a tribe and makes observations that diverge drastically from European common knowledge of the time about the inhabitants of the New World. The tribe, long since extinct, appears to him, not as a band of savages, but as a society and culture in their own right. Nevertheless, after his rescue and return to Europe, he is unable to tell its story in any way except through the literary structures that misrepresent his own experience and portray the Natives in a traditional and, ultimately, derogatory light.

The recovery of the Indigenous past by the historical novel is especially relevant in an Argentinean context because the Indigenous population of the Pampas, called Ranqueles, as well as the inhabitants of Patagonia, Tehuelches and Mapuches, and those from Tierra del Fuego, Selkhnams, Yamana, and Kawéskar were, in effect, the first *desaparecidos*. As mentioned in previous chapters, the politics of exclusion were formulated in the nineteenth century and provided a foundation for the discourse that enabled the legitimization of subsequent segregationist practices which made the Process of National Reorganization conceivable. It is not a coincidence that, at the end of the dictatorship, David Viñas, a political exile, pointed in *Indios, ejército y frontera* (1982) to the analogy between the Indigenous people of the nineteenth century and more recent political *desaparecidos*:

> Porque me interesa saber no sólo de los negociados que se hicieron con las tierras de los indios [...]. No sólo de los procedimientos con que la élite liberal utilizó a los indios como mano de obra servil. De todo eso sé, pero también de lo que se ha eludido [...]. ¿No hubo vencidos? ¿No hubo violadas? ¿O no hubo indias ni indios? ¿O los indios fueron conquistados por las exhortaciones piadosas de la civilización liberal-burguesa que los convenció que se sometieran e integraran en paz? ¿Qué significa integrarse?

> [...] ¿Por qué no se habla de los indios en Argentina? [...] Se trataría, paradójicamente, ¿del discurso del silencio? O quizá, los indios ¿fueron los desaparecidos de 1879? (as quoted in Bracamonte[19])

The "disappearing" of people who did not correspond to the self-image desired by the group that had usurped the right to define the nation was undeniably practised during the last military dictatorship of the twentieth century. Yet, as Susana Rotker notes, the plight of the disappeared results from a practice that regularly surfaces in Argentinean history as a strategy for avoiding the negotiation that political interaction demands and negating both the drama of the victims and the responsibility of their executioners. "Time and again", writes Rotker, "a restrictive principle of organization is imposed: *nothing has happened here*" (35).

The phrase attributed to Carlos Fuentes that Mexicans descended from the Aztecs and Mayas[20], Peruvians from the Incas, and Argentineans from boats is thus misleading, to say the least. If official Argentina is predominantly white, it is because the Indians, the New World Africans, and even the *mestizo* have been eliminated and written out of the national culture. The elimination of the non-European groups from Argentina reflects a vision of the nation that was finalized by the end of the nineteenth century as a product of the triumph of a liberal-bourgeois elite fascinated with European culture. It is interesting to note, moreover, that even the Indigenous heritage of the *gaucho* was erased. In order to include him in the national mythology, writers like Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, Jorge Luis Borges, and Adolfo Bioy Casares perceived him as a social rather than an ethnic type (Rotker 45).

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[19] *http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/*

[20] http://www.lostubos.com/verNoticia.php?Cve_Noti=4005

As Jorge Bracamonte points out, the eradication of Native Americans from the territory that today constitutes Argentina was gradual. The Spanish conquest of the continent in the sixteenth century was not total and south of Buenos Aires there remained Native territory inhabited by nations who occasionally ventured into colonized lands. The Argentinean frontier was a space where both cultures met either violently or through the mixing of races. When the Wars of Independence began, liberal intellectuals were already considering the eventual incorporation, integration, and assimilation of the "barbarians" into the new nation that was about to be proclaimed. This idea suffered radicalization, however, as the political situation in Argentina stabilized and the new elites planned to extend the new nation-state economically and territorially in order to compete better in the global market. The project was carried out by a white elite whose ambition was the modernization of Argentina which demanded a systematic ordering of the world threatened by the existence of an unstable frontier. Thus, the nineteenth-century wars against Amerindians in Argentina, known as the *Campaña del Desierto*, were wars of extermination aimed at the eventual annihilation of the Indigenous nations. They should be interpreted, Bracamonte notes, in the same manner as the war against Paraguay, or the submission of regional caudillos to Buenos Aires, as the removal of cultural differences through the process of state centralization intended to impose a uniform political and economic organization.

The exclusion of Amerindians from the Argentinean nation was ideologically possible through the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism which was inherited from the Enlightenment and manifested itself in a paternalistic approach to autochthonous cultures and a lack of awareness about their world. With time, the

opposition of the civilized against the "savage" found new legitimizations in the "scientific" discourse that created hierarchies among racial types. As Bracamonte concludes:

> Es casualmente esa conciencia de la "superioridad racial" la que legitimó la "Conquista" definitiva de los territorios a la "Barbarie". El argumento racial basamentado científicamente se vuelve la forma discursiva posible que encubre la resolución final del conflicto político-económico de la "Guerra de Fronteras", conflicto solucionado por la ocupación violenta de los territorios indios y el exterminio masivo – genocidio – de éstos. En la práctica, los argumentos "cientificistas" y "civilizatorios" sarmientinos habían sido la justificación de la implementación militarizada de una economía, política y cultura blanca, base de la instauración de lo que Viñas conceptualiza aludiendo a la "Conquista del Desierto" del siglo XIX argentino y sus similares latinoamericanos como "Etapa superior de la conquista" española renacentista. Llamativamente, que Argentina haya asumido que el exterminio de los indios de su territorio se denomine "Conquista del Desierto" marca cómo aquella continuidad que el Estado burgués liberal estableció con los que consideraba su gran antecedente – los conquistadores españoles –, siguió después vigente, como relato oficial de la Cultura del país.

The presence of the Indigenous was erased from the national project and culture entirely. Argentina lacks, for example, Indigenous writers like Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616) from Peru or Ignacio Altamirano (1834-1893) from Mexico, although both of these, to a lesser or greater degree, were assimilated to a European worldview. Moreover, the literature of the nineteenth century presented the Indigenous according to the dichotomy civilization and barbarism which demonized the figure of the Indian living on the frontier. It was he who kidnapped, maltreated, and tortured women and children, as in Esteban Echeverría's *La cautiva* (1837). Although the captive María, who represents civilization in Echeverría's narrative, escapes with her husband, they both die of their hardships provoked by a hostile (savage) environment; and, in the case of María, her death is hastened by the grief at the loss of her son killed by "barbarians". The Indian

in Echeverría's fiction, a symbol of the threat to and potential destruction of the civilized world, is perpetuated explicitly in *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* (1879) by José Hernández. In Echeverría's epic, María escapes her aggressor and attempts to return to civilization, but in *La vuelta* the female captive is a victim on the verge of death found by Martín Fierro. Not only has she been tortured, but her child has been barbarously murdered in front of her:

> y por colmar su amargura,
> a su tierna criatura
> se la degolló a sus pies. (Hernández, VIII, 1102-04)
>
> esos horrores tremendos
> no los inventa el cristiano;
> "ese bárbaro inhumano,
> sollozando me lo dijo,
> se amarró luego las manos
> con las tripitas de mi hijo". (Hernández, VIII, 1111-16)

The Indian in nineteenth-century literature is fearsome, bloodthirsty, inhuman, and savage, a danger to the order of white civilized man. Such a construction of the Other was present in the culture and the policies that it informed were carried out by the national army, whose campaigns not only assured the expulsion of Indigenous people from the national project but also the idea of racial mixing. As David Lagmanovich argues in his article about the representation of women in nineteenth-century literature "Tres cautivas: Echeverría, Ascasubi, Hernández" (1979), the captive women in Argentinean literature who were exposed to barbarism were ostracized. In *La cautiva*, María conveniently dies, in *La vuelta* the captive is anonymous, without a name, hence non-existent, but, in *Santos Vega o los mellizos de La Flor* (1872) by Hilario Ascasubi, Rosa Berdún, a captive who returns to civilization never tells of her experiences among

Indigenous people, as if nothing had ever happened. Against the background of these literary representations, the question of the perspective of Indigenous people in the historical novel of the last thirty years or so is, therefore, not only an aesthetic exercise but also a question about Argentinean identity and the sense of national identity that has been constructed since the foundation of the nation in the nineteenth century. The recovery of a silent and forgotten past in the historical novel is an attempt to acknowledge the existence of the absent nations and to reconsider the construction of national identity.

Tierra del Fuego

In *La tierra del fuego* (1998), winner of the 2000 Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Prize and the Buenos Aires Book Fair "Best Book of the Year", Sylvia Iparraguirre retrieves the Indigenous past and turns her attention to the southernmost tip of the continent and the Native inhabitants living there in the nineteenth century. The novel narrates the story of the voyages of the British exploration ship *HMS Beagle* along the shores of Argentina between 1829 and 1830 and the subsequent capture and abduction of Jemmy Button and two other Yamanas who were taken to England in order to be educated in "civilized ways"[21]. It also tells of the return of the Natives to Tierra del Fuego in 1831 as bearers of enlightened society with the hope they would spread civilization to their countrymen. To the horror of their former captors, however, a few years after their return to their homeland, one of them, named Jemmy Button, allegedly led a revolt of Natives against a

[21] Throughout the chapter, I use the notions "English" and "British" synonymously. Although I am aware of the difference between those two concepts, the narrator uses the term "inglés" in *La tierra del fuego* to embrace both English and British.

mission established in the land of the Yamana and was brought to trial for it, although he was eventually cleared of all charges.

The choice of the ethnic group in Iparraguirre's novel draws our attention for several reasons. The Yamana were among the most primitive and technologically underdeveloped ethnic groups on the continent, and one of the last such groups to disappear because they had previously been protected by their isolation in the South of Argentina. Moreover, unlike the people who inhabited the River Plate or the pampas, the Yamana were not described by the Spanish in the sixteenth century but by the English in the 1800s according to epistemological paradigms of the later period of time. The encounter between English and Yamana was, indeed, quite extraordinary: representatives of the most advanced, powerful, and "civilized" nation on the planet met the most primitive people on American soil. This historic event, the meeting between nomadic Yamana and sophisticated Englishmen, embodied precisely the two extremes of Sarmiento's dichotomy.

The voyages of *HMS Beagle* are not traditionally an emblematic part of Argentinean history, but a significant episode of the history of the British Empire, its expansion during the nineteenth century, and its mission to enlighten the uncivilized world. Although many of its achievements, as the Prometheus of modern times, have recently been stripped of their luster, the fact remains that, after dismantling the military power of France with the defeat of Napoleon, British dominance in world affairs was more or less unchallenged until the rise of Germany in the twentieth century. The most important element in building this colonial power was the navy. As Arthur Herman notes,

not without a degree of self-satisfaction that reveals his own Eurocentrism, in *To Rule the Waves* (1961):

> Without [the British Navy], a British Empire would have been unthinkable, and without the British Empire and its successor, the Commonwealth, half the world's independent nations would not exist today. Other nations might have built a modern world but they probably would not have done it as quickly, efficiently – or as humanely. (xvii)

The *Beagle* represents the achievements of English civilization and its contribution to science, especially the theory of natural selection formulated by Charles Darwin as a consequence of discoveries made during his circumnavigation of the globe on board this ship. Given its importance in the history of the development of scientific thought, the voyage of the *Beagle* belongs to world history as one of the events that have most shaped how we understand our world today. At the same time, however, as an example of British maritime reach and power, the *Beagle* also embodies the negative side of imperial expansion. The quotation from Herman's naval history of Britain cited above, as suggested already, emanates a sense of superiority and authority that the British had about themselves, their culture, and political and social institutions in imperial times, although, to judge by Herman's tone, this attitude of self-confidence and self-congratulation evidently survived at least until 1961.

The ideals of the Empire, the illusion of spreading light to the dark corners of the world were adopted by the Argentine elite in their formulations of the nation. The English component in the sum that added up to what Argentina would become was as crucial as *criollo* traditions and definitely more relevant than the Indigenous heritage could ever be. Argentinean intellectuals of the nineteenth century regarded the achievements of France, Germany, the United States, and even Spain very highly, but

they especially admired British civilization. Not only was it a sophisticated European culture that could easily compare to the French or Spanish in artistic accomplishment, but it also displayed a pragmatism that the French and Spanish lacked and Argentineans envied. The English could be proud of their wonderful literature and dynamic record in science. They had also won wars, and were excellent administrators (or so it was believed), which guaranteed the development of commerce and the disproportionate enrichment of a relatively small European island. Britain was everything Argentina wanted to be.

The ties between Argentina and England, however, went beyond intellectual fascination. From the very beginning of the emancipation of the country, England was a commercial partner in the Southern Cone that retained its importance throughout the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth. Halperín Donghi, writing of the period between 1850 and 1880, notes:

> Latin America's entry into the world market could not be totally monopolized by the British, but they maintained a predominant role despite the competition of other European countries. [...] However, the appearance of alternative European markets for Latin American exports did not automatically imperil British hegemony over Latin American imports. Argentina might sell principally to France, Belgium, and Spain but it still bought mostly from Great Britain. (1993 123)

The British presence was felt not only through the extensive investment in, for example, the railroads and the cattle industry, and through the goods that Argentina imported, but also at a more personal and intimate level through the many people who immigrated to Argentina from Britain, invested, and became part of the established elite. The English presence, in other words, was as much part of the Argentinean reality as the Indians were.

Since Argentina had been an anglophile nation from its beginnings, Iparraguirre's concentration on English civilization in *La tierra del fuego* discloses part of the cultural and epistemological model on which her country was built. In this respect, her narrative about the encounter between the Yamana and the crew of *HMS Beagle* provides an ideal opportunity to critique and deconstruct this model and how it enabled a paternalistic perception of the Indigenous people as savages, and provided the legitimization for their eventual elimination. The recovery of the memory of the Yamana in *La tierra del fuego* has the revisionist purpose of including the Indigenous people in national history, but it can also be seen as an analysis of the Argentinean imaginary and national identity. Given that the representation of the Other not only describes the object of representation but equally defines the instance that produces it, the matter of how Argentineans represent the Native inevitably gives rise to questions about Argentineans themselves. On the one hand, such questions are related to an historical epistemology from a time when Britain and a British imaginary were considered eminent in science and popular imagination. On the other hand, the revision of the past from the perspective of the present and the inclusion of Indigenous people in the discourse of the nation offer an opportunity for a new look at the epistemology of the past and to propose an imaginary more relevant to a new post-dictatorial Argentina.

In *La tierra del fuego*, Iparraguirre undertakes an analysis of the dichotomy of civilization and barbarism in its purest, almost impossible, form intended to re-evaluate the presence of both the Indigenous peoples and the English in Argentinean culture. For this reason, the protagonist and narrator of the novel is an Argentinean sailor, John William Guevara, called Jack, whose status as a bilingual "outsider" with an English

father and a *criollo* mother places him on both sides of the divide. He witnesses the encounter, the process of civilizing the Yamana, and the results of this endeavor. He also travels to London where he is a guide to Jemmy Button, whom he befriends, and where he discovers the source of the ambitions of his countrymen as well as his own roots. As he writes about his experiences aboard *HMS Beagle* and his adventures in the capital of the British Empire he is forced to reconsider his own identity. He is caught between the desire of the elites to transform Argentina into a European country and the simultaneous existence and influence of the Indigenous cultures and their existence through the racial diversity and mixing that, later on, were erased from national memory. In other words, Guevara is writing a new and self-reflexive historical text that runs contrary to the way history was written in the nineteenth century and is specific to the end of the twentieth century.

The letter

La tierra del fuego opens with the arrival in 1886 of a messenger in a small village called Lobos on the Argentinean pampas, over sixteen years after General Roca's Desert Campaign that had finally "resolved" the Indigenous question. The letter he brings is addressed to the narrator of the novel. It requests him, in the name of the British Admiralty, to produce an account of his voyages to Tierra del Fuego aboard the *Beagle* that included the abduction and eventual return of three Yamana people, among them Jemmy Button, who, years after his return to Cape Horn, allegedly led an attack on a British expedition that had landed in Tierra del Fuego:

> *...siendo usted un testigo privilegiado y directo de los hechos, desearíamos que realizara una noticia completa de aquel viaje y del posterior destino del desdichado indígena que participó liderando la matanza por la que ha sido juzgado en las Islas.* (18)

Guevara shows a degree of reluctance to respond to the letter because the demand of the British Admiralty imposes on him a discourse he is not enthusiastic to produce. The eventual response should be in English[22], which is not a problem for Guevara from a linguistic point of view, but the use of the language implies also a certain form and a worldview that he does not necessarily share with the Admiralty. Guevara, apparently, mistrusts the British Empire and is both astonished and scandalized that he was found in a remote area of a different country, where there is no regular postal service, and that the Admiralty was aware of his secret passage to the Falkland/Malvinas Islands, forbidden territory for citizens of the Argentinean Confederation, for the trial of Jemmy Button. "Gran Bretaña parece saberlo todo" (28), he remarks and the comment sounds both bitter and defiant. Guevara belongs to a different reality from that of the Admiralty. He lives on the pampas, an isolated and uncivilized part of the world, and most of his neighbors are illiterate. Nevertheless, the dissimilarity between rural Argentina and England does not make Lobos a savage land or England the essence of civilization and bearer of all idealism and morality. The Falkland Islands, for example, Guevara remarks, were illegally taken by Britain and should by right be Argentinean (26). The civilized Empire, therefore, does not comply with its own moral values and does not hesitate to appropriate

[22] On several occasions the narrator introduces English texts that he translates. In every case, he precedes the translation with the information to the reader that he is translating, for example: "Leí otra vez lo que ahora traduzco: [...]" (18). In other words, he translates everything so that it may be read from the perspective of Spanish.

territory illegally. Under such circumstances Guevara's voyage aboard *HMS Beagle* is seen from two perspectives:

> Hay dos modos de ver esta empresa, a mi modo de entender: una la del progreso civilizador, posesión de los hombres que hacen la historia. En este caso, el fin justifica los medios ya que se trata de llevar la luz de la ilustración a tierras y seres hundidos en la oscuridad. El fin es noble; en consecuencia, los medios pueden no serlo.
>
> Otra lectura es contraria a la supuesta filantropía de los hombres venidos del este – así los llamaba Button –; bajo esta manera de ver los hechos, esa supuesta razón civilizadora se transmuta en otra especie de barbarie, más refinada que la barbarie que combate, más taimada. El único lema de este comportamiento puede formularse así: "Todo lo que convenga a los fines, sí; lo que no convenga a los fines debe ser transformado, reducido o eliminado." (35)

Guevara mistrusts the British Empire and the values it represents and is very critical of its notion of civilization. The experiment with Jemmy Button failed, surprisingly for the English, although, for him, an Argentinean, or simply a non-Briton, it was a natural and logical consequence of Button's abduction (28-33). Although the Yamanas and the Argentineans alike are not considered civilized by the English, it was, according to Guevara, the exposure to Western civilization that pushed Button to view the Europeans in a particular way and made it conceivable for him to attack the crew of the *Allen Gardner*, the incident for which in due course he would be brought to trial. In general, Guevara considers the process of global civilizing doomed to failure and sees in European civilization itself yet another type of barbarism, much more aggressive and dangerous than that attributed to non-Europeans.

The failure of the experiment with Jemmy Button is not the only manifestation of the shortcomings of English/European values found in the novel. Guevara learns from the letter received from the Admiralty that a few months earlier the former captain of *HMS*

Beagle, Sir Robert Fitzroy, had committed suicide. The historical Fitzroy was an exceptional man, as Peter Nichols notes in his biography of him, *Evolution's Captain: the Story of Kidnapping that Led to Charles Darwin's Voyage Aboard the "Beagle"* (2003). Extremely well educated, an excellent sailor, and connected to the British royal family, Fitzroy personified the pinnacle of science and culture of his time. Yet, despite his many achievements, the circumnavigation of the world, his mapping of South America, and establishing the scientific bases of meteorology, Fitzroy took his life by cutting his throat with a razor blade on a morning of 1885. In Nichols' biography of the captain, his suicide is explained by several factors: his desperate act might have been triggered by a predisposition for clinical depression running in his family; he might have been driven to commit suicide from the remorse he felt on the publication of Charles Darwin's theories after the voyage of the *Beagle*, because to him, a deeply religious man, they appeared heretical; or, finally, in a more romantic vein, he might have fallen victim to the curse of the *Beagle*. Pringle Strokes, Fitzroy's predecessor in command of the ship, not only went mad but took his own life by inflicting multiple stab wounds to the chest on himself (Nichols 16).

In Iparraguirre's novel, however, Fitzroy's suicide can also be interpreted as the result of extreme disenchantment with modern European culture and the idea of progress. The goals of "civilization" seemed unachievable and progress implied practices that contradicted the moral principles in name of which the British Empire undertook the mission to enlighten the "uncivilized". Since Fitzroy identified himself so completely with civilization, his disillusion at the outcome of his project also became his personal failure. Such an interpretation is confirmed by another suicide in the novel, Guevara's

father, a British soldier who came to Argentina in 1806. As a man who sought to bring civilization to the desolate plains of the pampas, he ends up hanging himself after leaving to his then teenage son the heritage of knowledge of his language and the ability to read.

Guevara refuses to write back to the Admiralty because he does not want to contribute a narrative to civilization that would help to explain the world and enhance a power that from his perspective is foreign and destructive. His refusal, however, is not related to the act of writing itself, an endeavor to which he ultimately succumbs, but rather to the form in which he is supposed to report the past. The letter from London imposes English on him as the language in which he is required to respond and in a letter/report as the form he is expected to adopt. English, however, organizes the world according to an English imaginary and Tierra del Fuego belongs to a reality that Guevara considers Argentinean, even if the southernmost tip of the country is widely unknown to his countrymen. Guevara's account of the voyages of the *Beagle* is therefore intended to incorporate Tierra del Fuego and its inhabitants into the national imaginary through the medium of Spanish. Accordingly, all his experiences narrated in the novel are told in Spanish and the documents he adds to his account are translated into that language, as he notes in his text, when, for example, he remarks: "Leí otra vez lo que ahora traduzco..." (18; see above note 3). The choice of language in which his story is told marks an attempt at political, aesthetic, and epistemological independence by the narrator from an English hegemonic discourse. Consequently, given the ambiguity of Guevara's attitude towards civilization, the description of the past and of Jemmy Button will differ from that which might have been attempted in traditional historiography, as I shall explain.

The refusal to comply with the rules of western historiography goes beyond Guevara's attitude towards civilization and English as its medium. Since he is no longer part of the mainstream, he perceives history from "outside", not as a narrative that claims to explain the past in an unquestionably truthful manner, but as a literary text susceptible to interpretation:

> Por muchos años yo viví dentro de la Historia. Ahora estoy al margen, y puedo descifrar los acontecimientos del pasado como se descifra una escritura. No defiendo ninguna posición [...]. (34)

His mistrust extends to the imaginary he will refer to and the literary constructions that he will use to narrate his adventures in the southern hemisphere. In other words, he is aware of the discrepancy between the past as such, its representation, and the fact that the latter relies to a great degree on language and its structures. Indeed, Guevara informs his future reader that his story depends not only on the events that took place during the famous voyage but also on his aesthetic experiences and the literary forms that, inevitably, he will use. As his imagination fills the blanks of history and gives his narration coherence, the legends he has heard, the images he has seen, and books he has read affect the account of his voyage and his representation of Jemmy:

> [...] estimulada por la carta, la memoria parece juntar o superponer, para traerlos al presente, hechos distantes entre sí o de diferente naturaleza. Sobre lo que se me pide que relate pesa no sólo lo que vi y viví sino lo que leí o me contaron. Acuden interminables noches marineras plenas de viejas historias de naufragios con las que, al mismo tiempo que se sostenía una tradición, se sembraba de terrores el alma del grumete, tal vez preparándolo para lo que le tocaría vivir. Historias remotas de españoles u holandeses ya tejidas en la leyenda, o historias recientes, indudables en la precisión de detalles, o sucesos concretos como el encuentro con el libro de Melville aquel crudo invierno que nos detuvo en el puerto de Nueva York, el invierno de 1853. (35-36)

Guevara is also aware that he knows more about the past than he did at the moment when he was living it and that now, at the moment of writing the account, he mixes what he knew back then with what he is aware of now. His knowledge not only affects the information he presents in his account but how he organizes it.

In spite of his critical attitude towards civilization, Guevara does not reject everything related to it, just as he does not discard the importance of writing about the past, because the culture of civilization is an integral part of his own identity. At some level, he appreciates European and English culture. He says: "Los libros que he leído los debo a Inglaterra" (38), but he is also aware that this civilization perceives his world from the outside and inevitably distorts it to comply with the interests of Europeans and the white elite of his own country. This love-hate relationship with the British Empire will push him to write an account that in an effort to present the voyage of *HMS Beagle*, his own life, and, most importantly, Jemmy Button's will embody to the same degree both his appreciation of the English imaginary and his critique of it.

Guevara attempts to fulfill the formal obligations of the request to write an account but does so on his own terms: his reply is in Spanish and addressed to "Mr MacDowell or MacDowness" (22). The vagueness of the name of the person who wrote to him on behalf of the Admiralty is due in part to the fact that Guevara cannot decipher the signature at the bottom of the letter he has received; but the name also has a secondary meaning. "Mr MacDowell or MacDowness" represents civilization and to invoke him, which Guevara does fifty-two times in the course of the novel, maintains a situation of dialogue between him, an Argentinean, and the British Admiralty, the ultimate embodiment of civilization. "MacDowell" and "MacDowness" suggests his

inability to recognize the name of that person but also raises the possibility that one individual embodies another one. "MacDowell" and "MacDowness", one positive and the other negative, may reflect Guevara's view of English culture in a manner similar to how the names of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde embody a genius and a monster. He unfolds his point of view of the past in a civilized way, using a discourse that can be acknowledged by civilization. At the same time, however, he maintains the integrity of his own perspective and identity by refusing to adopt the language of the Empire, the form of a letter, and traditional historiographic models to write about the past.

The text of his account is formally very loose. It will never be sent to the Admiralty and it combines an account of events, Guevara's reflections about the process of writing, quotations from letters, journals, translations, court proceedings, and his comments about civilization, progress, and epistemology. In one sense he is writing a new historical text which has the character of a new historical novel. He negotiates various imaginaries in a very self-conscious discourse with the objective of responding to a question about who Jemmy Button was in a way that will actually provide Guevara himself with a sense of identity and define Argentina with respect to the dichotomy of civilization and barbarism. If he were to express the past, his past, in English terms, it would mean that the present is formed according to an outside imaginary that would place Guevara and his countrymen in a similar voiceless position as all the other Yamana.

The narrator of Iparraguirre's novel finds himself at a crossroads. On one hand, he admires the discourse of civilization – its language, the form that his account is expected to take, historiography, the imaginary on which he will rely. On the other, he feels the urge to produce an account that will resist the discourse of civilization because it

simplifies, undermines, misrepresents, and, finally, destroys his reality. The structure of the novel depends to a great degree on the position that the narrator adopts. Two narrative levels coexist from the beginning: the present when the writing takes place in Lobos, and the past, represented in the account of events related to the voyage of the *Beagle*. At the same time, the narrator allows for multiple focalizations. He endeavors to present Jemmy Button's perspective, and integrates newspapers, letters, translations, and other documents as has already been mentioned. The letter to "Mr MacDowell or MacDowness" is gradually transformed into something else, the nature of which will not be revealed until the end of the novel. It is worth noting, however, that the perspective of the Yamana is absent from the novel with the exception of moments when Jemmy Button's direct interaction with Jack Guevara is reported. At the heart of the novel, therefore, is the quest of the Argentinean protagonist/narrator to fill this absence by representing Jemmy Button as he can, an Indigenous man who was part of Argentina, but who disappeared under the weight of civilization.

The importance of narrating Jemmy Button's story from the perspective of an Argentinean sailor consists in the retrieval of a part of the past that was eliminated from the official history of Argentina. However, the revisionist commentary on historiography that this implies is not only about the inclusion in the national discourse of the past of a marginalized group. It also has to do with the nature of Argentinean historiography itself in light of the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism, which had a decisive influence on the political processes of exclusion. National history was based on epistemological paradigms that depended on the civilized and, to a certain degree, on a

foreign discourse. But Iparraguirre's novel seeks to present an authentically Argentinean perspective, which is neither European nor Indigenous but an amalgam of the two.

Heart of Darkness, Heart of Civilization

> "And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth."
> (Joseph Conrad)

The term civilization, as used by Domingo F. Sarmiento, refers to the spiritual, intellectual, social, technological, and aesthetic achievements of European culture and its adaptation in an Argentinean context, mainly through the culture of the cities:

> La ciudad es el centro de la civilización argentina, española, europea; allí están los talleres de las artes, las tiendas del comercio, las escuelas y colegios, los juzgados, todo lo que caracteriza, en fin, a los pueblos cultos.
>
> La elegancia en los modales, las comodidades del lujo, los vestidos europeos, el frac y la levita tienen allí su teatro y su lugar conveniente. No sin objeto hago esta enumeración trivial. La ciudad capital de las provincias pastoras existe algunas veces ella sola sin ciudades menores, y no falta alguna en que el terreno inculto llegue hasta ligarse con las calles. El desierto las circunda a más o menos distancia, las cerca, las oprime; la naturaleza salvaje las reduce a unos estrechos oasis de civilización enclavados en un llano inculto de centenares de millas cuadradas, apenas interrumpido por una que otra villa de consideración. (27)

Once civilization was embraced by the elite that created a national discourse, it determined the epistemological practice that implemented a European imaginary to describe Argentinean reality. This was particularly relevant in the context of history which constituted a legitimizing, not to say mythologizing, discourse for the nation. For Argentina, as for the rest of Latin America, history emphasized the role of people of European descent in the formation of the nation by using a language that organized the world according to a Eurocentric vision. If Indigenous people were included in it, it was

only through the European imagination and the lens of the "legacy of Columbus" previously mentioned.

This is not to say that an Indigenous historiography would provide a more appropriate or "true" representation Argentina's past. The European component of the country, after all, constitutes an integral and no less authentic part of the nation. Rather, it means that the use and engagement with the European imaginary created a vision of the past that was elaborated according to paradigms that are currently considered to be partial and have been brought into question. Since the projects of modernization based on European models have failed, the discourses that legitimized those projects, history among them, seem to require reformulation. The example of perceptions of Indigenous peoples is eloquent in this context, in that the elimination of Native people from the national discourse is symptomatic of the beginning of processes that eventually culminated in the socio-political crises of 1970s and 1980s in Argentina.

The examination of the process of remembering the Yamana people, the voyage of the *Beagle*, and the subsequent attempt to represent the Native in a formal report calls for a reassessment of national historiography in Iparraguirre's novel in light of discursive forms used to formulate the nation's past. Jack Guevara's account of his encounter with the Yamana people and the metaphors and imaginary he uses define him and his culture. His story of the voyages on *HMS Beagle* is a kind of manifesto of an identity that struggles between conflicting ambitions. Jack finds himself in a position that requires him to align his story with the paradigms of civilization, with which he is unquestionably associated through ties of blood and education, although from the perspective of this paradigm he is an outsider. At the same time, he must include elements traditionally

defined as barbarian, but familiar to him as part of the *gaucho* culture in which he grew up, even if he is cast out by the civilized world by embracing them. In other words, Jack's narrative aims to formulate an Argentinean perspective on the "savage" so that Jack himself, an Argentinean, is recognized as a participant in the civilized world without part of his memory and identity being condemned to annihilation and oblivion. His admiration of civilization, therefore, is accompanied with feelings of alienation that pushed him to produce a discourse independent of European paradigms and able to represent the Yamana not as the Other but as an Argentine.

Guevara's journey aboard the *Beagle* appears in the novel as a journey similar to that undertaken by Charles Marlow in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), although this voyage is the reverse of Marlow's. Instead of traveling from London to the darkest corner of the word, Guevara starts his journey in the Argentinean barbarian pampas and heads towards the center of civilization, London. The journey along the Patagonian shore, across the ocean and eventually up the river Thames, however, aims not so much to explore the last dark side of the planet, as was the case of Marlow, but to discover the origins of a tradition that separates him from the savages. As mentioned above, the narrator, John William Guevara, also known as Jack, is Argentinean. He inherited this hybrid name from his English father, William Scott Mallory, and Argentinean mother, Lucía de Guevara. His identity is formed by two cultures. He speaks fluent English, the language in which he received his education and thanks to which he becomes, like his father, a sailor on a British ship. At the same time, he speaks Spanish, rides like a *gaucho*, and has an infinite fondness for the pampas. In other words, Jack

Guevara embodies the ideal of an Argentinean of which the nineteenth-century Liberals dreamed. His education made him intellectually English, but he has the soul of a *gaucho*.

The notion of civilization is formulated in the novel through the relationship that Guevara enjoys first with his father and, then, with Sir Robert Fitzroy, who may be considered a father figure for the young Jack. Although the bond that Guevara has with the two men is rather unaffectionate, he inherits from them both the idea of civilization that becomes part of his own identity. The civilization that Guevara unquestionably admires is defined by the English language, education, technology, science, art, and the general idea of enlightenment that accompanies those notions. In his account of the past he refers to Lord Byron, Herman Melville, Lord Castlereagh, Captain Cook, J.M.W. Turner, and to elements of an imaginary that defines English culture. He does it not so much to communicate with "MacDowell or MacDowness" but rather because he considers English culture to be part of his own heritage. Accordingly, civilization is present in his text not only through references to English-speaking writers, artists, and explorers, but also through allusions to tales and myths of the sea, popular beliefs, and other English narratives.

After receiving an English education from his father, Jack Guevara heads to Buenos Aires and Montevideo where he becomes aware of the degree of alienation that separates him, a provincial from Lobos, from the inhabitants of the big cities:

> Hoy solo puedo reírme de aquel muchacho al que todos en el lugar echaban discretas miradas de reojo, entre burlones y compasivos. En algún momento lo noté. La sangre se me subió a la cara: yo era un ignorante, un pajuerano y, a pesar del color de mi pelo, un gaucho. (75)

In Montevideo, Jack meets English sailors and, thanks to his knowledge of the language and basics of navigation, is able to sign on as a member of the crew of *HMS Beagle* and is introduced to the Captain. Fitzroy's quarters are to the young Jack's eyes everything that civilization symbolizes. The Captain's cabin is a carefully protected and elaborated piece of England to which he retires from the inferiority and backwardness of the surroundings:

> Cuando la puerta se abrió, se presentó ante mí un camarote atiborrado de libros, de mapas, de objetos sin nombre que, después supe, eran los instrumentos de medición marina y astronómica. Dos cuadros recordaban una campiña donde hombres y mujeres cabalgaban en medio de innumerables perros, un campo que no se parecía en nada al que yo acababa de dejar. [...]
>
> Mucho tiempo después aprendí que el Imperio había destilado en esa cabina sus más valiosos atributos [...]. (82)

At the beginning of the voyage, Jack's fascination with civilization grows. He is mesmerized by English. His fellow sailors, and especially the Captain, are to his eyes masters of the sea, and the *Beagle* seems to him not only an achievement of English technology, but the very embodiment of his father's stories. Jack is quickly accepted by the crew, which makes him feel part of the same world as the Captain and his father. However, when the ship finally reaches Tierra del Fuego after weeks of sailing, Jack's attraction to the civilized world slowly declines and his account becomes increasingly critical. His journey towards the center of civilization had enormous importance for him. London was the source of enlightenment on which his education was based and England held him in an emotional bond as the country of his biological and spiritual fathers. However, as the story progresses, the return to the source of light is transformed slowly into a voyage into the heart of darkness.

On reaching Tierra del Fuego, the Captain orders the abduction of three Yamana Natives. Their capture shows Jack the stern face of a civilization that eradicates cultural differences and is unsympathetic to any form of existence that does not conform to its own rules. All the abductees are immediately given English names, which constitutes a symbolic rite of passage as they enter the civilized world as well as a sign of domination. Nobody inquires about their Native names. The imposition of a European and English name on inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego not only questions the enlightened character of civilization but also its claims regarding truth. According to the Captain, the land from which the Yamana are taken is called *Tekeenica* (91) but, as Jack learns from one of the Natives, *Tekeenica* derived from the local expression *Teke uneka*, which means "I don't understand" and which the Natives repeated when addressed in English. The Captain, however, interpreted the expression according to his cultural contextualization and, then, institutionalized the mistaken name by writing it in his report. The discourse of civilization is thus discredited in *La tierra del fuego* not only as totalizing but also mistaken.

Jack's biggest disappointment with civilization comes, however, not from the treatment of the "savages" but in how the English perceive him, an Argentine, in relation to the Yamana. The youngest of the abducted Natives is named Jemmy Button, because his father gave him to Fitzroy in exchange for a button. After he is taken, Fitzroy immediately orders Jack to take care of Jemmy and prepare him for contact with civilization. His choice of companion for the young Yamana is significant. Jack undoubtedly is of the same age as Jemmy but, more importantly from Fitzroy's perspective, Guevara is Argentinean and therefore has more in common with the Yamana

than any other member of his crew. Nevertheless, from Jack's point of view, Jemmy is a savage with whom he, a civilized man, really has nothing in common. Regardless of his inadequacy for the task entrusted to him, Jack, a creature somehow between civilization and barbarism, introduces Jemmy to Western culture. He teaches him to speak English, to wear European clothes and to act according to Western etiquette. The time spent with the young Yamana builds a friendship between the two young men and allows Jack to see Jemmy in a light different from how the rest of the crew sees him. Their relationship becomes personal and frees Jack from preconceptions about native Fuegians. He does not in any way identify with Jemmy but as they head to London he sees the Yamana as a being in his own right, not as the Other, but as an individual like himself.

The journey to London had greater importance on Jack than on the rest of the crew of the *Beagle*. He was from Latin America, a continent whose population included the result of racial mixing between Europeans, Amerindians, and African descendants of slaves. Although Jack did not descend from the Indigenous inhabitants of America he was tainted by the fact that he was not born in Europe. He is a new being, a *criollo*, and does not know precisely where he belongs. He represents what Latin America, and especially Argentina, was becoming ethnicly and nationally. Yet, since London, the center of civilization, was also the birthplace of his father, his return to the city is a reaffirmation of his origins and identity. For this reason, during his stay, Guevara spends countless hours wandering with Jemmy Button through the streets of London in search of traces of his father. In order to adopt his heritage fully, he embraces and lives the stories his father told him or that Jack read about in adventure novels. He spends hours drinking in taverns, gets into fights in the darkest corners of London, and has affairs with women,

including an exotic prostitute named Isabella. She is a grand-daughter of "the Venetian", a former companion of Captain Cook who, after his death, was forced to make her living from her charms. This all constitutes a rite of passage for Guevara, intended to allow him to appropriate fully the culture he considers his own. All his adventures in London are significant because they are part of a sailor's mythology cherished by his father. In the taverns, gallons of alcohol are consumed by drunken sailors, strong men who, for a beer or two, would tell him fantastic stories about his father or the sea. His adventure with the grand-daughter of "the Venetian" is especially significant and seems to derive from a novel by Melville or from popular shanties, such as *Haul away, Joe* which praise the sexual exploits of sailors with salty humor:

> When I was a little lad and so me mother told me,
> Way haul away, we'll haul away Joe.
> That if I did not kiss the girls me lips would grow all moldy.
> Way haul away, we'll haul away Joe.[23]

In this context, Guevara develops a very personal relationship with the English imaginary he appropriated to describe his life and create a sense of identity. Throughout the novel he refers to the English language, and the cultured and scientific traditions of Britain. Nevertheless, in spite of his cultural ties, he maintains a distance from England in his narrative which is evidenced by the consistent formal reference to "Mr. MacDowell or MacDowness" and the adoption of possessive adjectives that exclude himself from British cultural circle as when he writes admiringly of a storm over the pampas and comments:

> Una tormenta en la pampa, míster MacDowell o MacDowness, es algo que usted no podría siquiera imaginar desde la estrechez de su despacho [...]

[23] http://www.chivalry.com/cantaria/lyrics/haul_away_joe.html

> Cesan los truenos y los relámpagos, súbitamente cesa la lluvia y una claridad sobrenatural se abre en el cielo y baña la llanura con colores tan vívidos y delicados que sólo un hombre extremadamente sensible a la luz como *su* Turner podría describir. (116; emphasis mine)

Jack admits he is not part of the culture represented by "MacDowell or MacDowness" and the formal aspects of his account serve only to emphasize this separation. He undoubtedly shares an admiration for the British and considers some of its heritage universal, and therefore his own, but he also feels alienated, regardless of his biological bond to England. The source of his estrangement may be found in the dichotomy of civilization and barbarism manifested in how Jemmy Button is perceived by others, which remains at the center of Jack's account. In order to formulate his story, Jack must confront this dichotomy. Although Jemmy Button's position within this opposition appears obvious at first sight and he represents the far side of barbarism – the "savage" – Jack's perception of him evolves as his story progresses, which unavoidably leads him to reconsider the implications of the conventional dichotomy and to wonder if civilization is really what it claims to be if Jemmy is not the true representation of barbarism.

At the beginning of the voyage Guevara considers himself part of civilization but his alienation in London makes him doubt this assumption: he is not considered by the British to be one of them and the reality of civilization is far from its idealistic formulations. Like Marlow, Guevara heads to the center of the unknown and, just like him, finds the unexpected. As Marlow sailed deeper and deeper into the unpredictable land of the upper reaches of the Congo River he was exposed to increasing manifestations of barbarism: he is attacked by Indigenous people; some of his African companions turn out to be cannibals; and he sees the deterioration of manners and

morality in the Europeans who were surrounded by Africa and exposed to it for a longer period of time. Nevertheless, the heart of darkness, the unbearable horror to which he was heading to relieve one of his company employees, does not originate in the uncivilized ways of the aboriginals but, quite the contrary, in the methods and leadership of the European representatives of the company. The heart of darkness was not buried deep in an exotic African land and the unseemly customs of its inhabitants, but was an inherent part of the colonizing culture that, through inhuman treatment and exploitation, not only incited barbarous attitudes in the Native people but also served, due to the position of power held by the Europeans, as a model to emulate. In Guevara's case, although his encounter with the Yamana in Tierra del Fuego was shocking because they were barely dressed and ignorant of Western civilization, the acts of barbarism that he experiences take place on board the ship. The crew is rude and disrespectful towards the Yamanas, sailors kill a young seal merely for amusement, and indulge in carnal pleasures as soon as they drop anchor in a "civilized" port.

The culmination of Jack's experience of barbarism takes place in London where, to begin with, he is not accepted as one of the civilized, but where he also rejects what he sees because he considers it barbarism. The description of London occupying the majority of the Fourth Folio (107-56) is full of his disappointment at what was supposed to be the center of enlightenment. London appears in Jack's description as a pandemonium of cultures and as a savage land surrounding the Yamana captives and himself like some kind of enemy, ready to destroy them because of their differences. Upon their arrival, Guevara was forced to hold back the crowd from invading the inn where he was staying with the Yamana captives. The capital of England appears in Jack's

account as a city of chaos, filth and despair, where human life has little value and people are as aggressive as beasts. More importantly, when he realizes that he does not belong to this civilization, his position towards Jemmy shifts.

The metaphorical journey up the river that was supposed to reaffirm Guevara's identity as a man of civilization takes him unexpectedly to the heart of darkness. Instead of representing the source of enlightenment, London appears as a source of filth and barbarism far beyond the mere struggle for survival in the poorest parts of the city and extends to the calculated plans of the elite in the Admiralty to conquer and eventually destroy anything that does not concur with the culture of the conquerors. Both Guevara and Marlow, then, find darkness and barbarism in the very culture that claims to be enlightened. There is, however, a difference between the protagonists of Conrad's and Iparraguirre's works. Marlow was expecting intellectual and moral darkness in a land considered savage only to discover that horror and barbarism was not outside his own culture but part of it. In Guevara's case, his journey was supposed to lead him to the source of his culture. He discovers, however, that he, an Argentine, is outside this culture both because he is rejected by the English as a foreigner and because he, himself, denounces the values of civilization that he considers harmful. The horror and darkness that saturate civilization are not part of "his" culture, as in Marlow's case, but are part of a culture on which Argentina depends through its intimate relationship with England. He, therefore, finds himself in an advantageous position because his education enables him to understand and participate in English culture, allowing him to adopt its positive elements while, at the same time, rejecting the negative.

Guevara's criticism of civilization and the specific relationship he establishes with Jemmy Button does not place him on the side of "barbarism". The reevaluation of the concept that is embodied in the novel in the figure of the Yamana is not aimed at establishing a new link between Argentinean culture and its aboriginal tradition which could lead to claims of primal authenticity. For historical reasons, such a claim would be quite artificial because Argentinean culture is primarily of European origin. The Yamana persist throughout the novel as a mysterious entity whose thoughts are impossible for the narrator to decipher. Guevara learns about the different customs of the Yamana and their highly developed ethical system based on respect for nature. Through his experience with Jemmy, he ends up perceiving aboriginal culture as equal to the culture of civilization preferred by the white elite of his country. Nevertheless, he cannot in any way identify himself with Jemmy's culture beyond a certain admiration for natural beauty. The moment when Guevara makes his farewell to Jemmy and sees him for the last time depicts the character of their relationship:

> Button seguía inmóvil, en la popa, mirando hacia donde yo estaba cuando el barco puso proa al sur. Repentinamente se quitó la camisa y el pantalón y los arrojó por la borda, hacia arriba. Las pequeñas manchas flamearon un segundo en el aire, contra el cielo y cayeron al agua.
>
> Desnudo, levantó el brazo y lo sostuvo en alto; su mano, arriba, separó los dedos.
>
> Levanté mi brazo.
>
> Recuperada su desnudez esencial, Button volvía al hondo sueño de la Tierra del Fuego, al viento polar, a la libertad de sus bosques, al invierno más antiguo del mundo, a las altas hogueras de la noche austral, a su patria. (282-83)

Aboard the boat that eventually will return him to Tierra del Fuego, naked and waving at Jack Guevara, Jemmy Button symbolizes the insurmountable cultural separation between the two men. Jemmy is a human being who lives in symbiosis with his natural habitat, a

purity which Guevara is unable to relate to or fully understand and in which he is not really interested. Jemmy Button never told his side of the story and the memory of the events in which he participated exists only in the memory of others, another element that separated Button from Guevara. In this respect, Jack resembles the cabin boy from Saer's *El entenado*: he too is unable to tell the story of the Native people in any way other than the way that corresponds to his own culture. Nevertheless, Guevara waves back to Jemmy Button which not only acknowledges the presence of the Yamana but also establishes a friendly relationship based on tolerance for diversity. This is why Jack Guevara refers to Jemmy by his aboriginal name, Omoy-lume, at the end of the novel: he is the last person able to integrate the Yamana into the historical discourse of Argentina.

The reconsideration of the values of a culture that Jack Guevara considered fundamental for his own identity is generated by direct contact with the British, especially in London. Despite its beautiful buildings and developed infrastructure, the capital of the most developed nation in the world is a paradise only for a strict elite. The majority of the inhabitants struggle to survive in a manner that, in its way, is not far removed from the efforts of the Indigenous people from the region of Cape Horn. In contrast to the Yamana, however, the English did not display as strong an ethical system as the Fuegians and the hardship of living in an urban conglomeration brings out in them the worst of human nature. London's streets are full of thieves, beggars, unattended children, violence, and lust. The deep disrespect for anything foreign to English culture, the Yamana and Argentinean people, for example, is a direct consequence of a lax moral system. The reality of civilization contradicts poignantly with its ideals and is

categorically rejected by the Yamana, for whom civilization does not provide anything of value.

Since there are no contemporary written sources, it is impossible to write from the perspective of Argentinean Amerindians and any reconstruction would require the intermediary of archeology or ethnography. It is possible, however, to reconstruct the story of the group encountered by the British which may be taken as a standard from which to speak out for the excluded, the disappeared, and subjugated. In this respect, the British stand for the Argentinean. The accusation suggested by *La tierra del fuego* that the English destroyed the Yamanas and the condemnation of the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism are directed in reality at Argentinean elites that waged a war of extermination against Native people and pursued minorities that did not correspond to their artificially constructed idea of the nation.

The Tempest

The reevaluation of civilization does not mean its total rejection any more than the reevaluation of barbarism causes Guevara to embrace Indigenous culture in order to express himself. His story, after all, is told not only within a European imaginary and also draws particularly on the English culture that he admires. Rather than merely discrediting the culture of civilization and the epistemological paradigms that arose from it, Guevara carefully selects the elements he accepts as part of his own story and culture. He negotiates imaginaries that belong to civilization and barbarism and reformulates history rejecting the principle of exclusion by including the Indigenous component of his country in it.

By writing about the voyage of the *Beagle*, the encounter and friendship with Jemmy Button, and his trial on the islands, Jack Guevara creates a story that places him on the epistemological map and defines him as an Argentinean. The process of writing takes place in the middle of the pampas which he compares to the sea on several occasions. In Folio Four, Guevara looks up from his writing through the window and admires a storm that could be described, as he notes, only by Turner. In the middle of this tempest Jack contemplates his role as an historian of the events that took place in his youth. The presence of the storm as a background to his reflections about writing history is significant because it serves to draw our attention to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610) or, more importantly, to Latin American interpretations of the play in a postcolonial context that lead to formulations of Latin American identity. This is to say that it is relevant to consider *The Tempest* not because the play is specifically alluded to in *La tierra del fuego*, but because Shakespeare's work has served as a basis for some of the very ideas on inclusion and exclusion that are presented in Iparraguirre's novel.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is the story of the sorcerer Prospero, rightful Duke of Milan, and his daughter, Miranda, who have been stranded for twelve years on an island by Prospero's jealous brother Antonio. Prospero is reluctantly served by a spirit, Ariel, whom he had rescued from imprisonment in a tree where he had been trapped by the African witch Sycorax. She had been exiled to the island years before and died prior to Prospero's arrival, but she is survived by her son Caliban, a deformed monster and the only non-spiritual inhabitant before the arrival of Prospero, who initially adopted and educated him. He taught Prospero how to survive on the island, while Prospero and Miranda taught Caliban their religion and language. Following Caliban's attempted rape

of Miranda, however, he is compelled by Prospero to serve as his slave. In slavery Caliban has come to view Prospero as a usurper, and grown to resent both the sorcerer and his daughter for what he believes to be their betrayal of his trust; Prospero and Miranda in turn view Caliban with contempt and disgust. Miranda, as Susana Rotker notes (25), has a compelling part in the play and is much more than just a female character but the object of desire that demarcates the relationship of the other characters. Prospero hides Miranda's true identity from her and dedicates the lion's share of his time and effort to her education. She is his future, and is the key to the continuation of his line. She is also desired by Caliban. Ariel, on the other hand, remains indifferent to her as the result of his spiritual condition. Eventually, the tension in the play is resolved by an external intervention: Miranda meets Fernando, the son of the king of Naples who will marry her and make her queen.

The characters of Shakespeare's play have often been drawn on to explain Latin America, although the interpretation and meaning of *The Tempest* have varied with the passage of time and the changes in perspective this has brought. José Enrique Rodó in his essay *Ariel* (1900), presents the Shakespearean play as a depiction of tendencies present in a Latin America faced with difficulties in formulating its own identity. For Rodó, Próspero, who made himself lord of the island and subjugated Ariel and Caliban, is the "venerated master" adored by his disciples. Caliban, the barbarian, represented the seductive influence of a new form of barbarity disguised as civilization and present predominantly in the culture of the United States whose influence was becoming increasingly visible in Latin America at the beginning of the twentieth century. This new barbarism was utilitarianism, characterized by an attitude that favored material

development as an end in itself and despised spiritual values. According to Rodó, in order to find its own identity, Latin America should reject barbarism and the calibanesque and embrace values represented by Ariel:

> Ariel, genio del aire, representa, en el simbolismo de la obra de Shakespeare, la parte noble y alada del espíritu. Ariel es el imperio de la razón y el sentimiento sobre los bajos estímulos de la irracionalidad; es el entusiamo generoso, el móvil alto y desinteresado en la acción, la espiritualidad de la cultura, la vivacidad y la gracia de la inteligencia, – el término ideal a que asciende la selección humana, rectificando en el hombre superior los tenaces vestigios de Calibán, símbolo de sensualidad y de torpeza, con el cincel perseverante de la vida. (22)

The only possible way to achieve Ariel's high spirituality was to study and embrace the values at the heart of European civilization making the spirit of Latin America derive from the Greeks and Romans through the Italian Renaissance and the French Enlightenment. Ariel, therefore, was the idealistic, art-loving youth who represented the spirit and the youth of Latin America.

A different reading of *The Tempest* was proposed by Roberto Fernández Retamar in *Calibán* in 1971. For Fernádez Retamar, although Prospero still symbolized Spain, the colonial power, the true spirit of Latin America was not in Ariel, who was still the servant of Prospero, but in Caliban:

> Nuestro símbolo no es pues Ariel, como pensó Rodó, sino Calibán. Esto es algo que vemos con particular nitidez los mestizos que habitamos estas mismas islas donde vivió Calibán: Próspero invadió las islas, mató a nuestros ancestros, esclavizó a Calibán y le enseñó su idioma para poder entenderse con él: ¿qué otra cosa puede hacer Calibán sino utilizar ese mismo idioma – hoy no tiene otro – para maldecirlo, para desear que caiga sobre él "la roja plaga"? (30)

Fernández Retamar, who wrote his essay in Havana under the influence of the Cuban Revolution, questioned Rodó's Europeanized perspective and ambition claiming that

Caliban was not a monster but the true spirit of Latin America. In Fernández Retamar's interpretation Caliban is the typically degraded vision offered by the colonizer of the man he is colonizing. Prospero invaded the island, reduced Caliban to slavery, taught him his language and the only thing left to Caliban is to curse Prospero in the only language now he has: Spanish.

Echoes of *The Tempest* can be heard in Sylvia Iparraguirre's *La tierra del fuego* that suggest an interesting interpretation of the novel and reaffirm elements of my discussion of it. For this purpose, however, it is also useful to turn to a reading of *The Tempest* proposed by Susana Rotker in her book *Captive Women: Oblivion and Memory in Argentiña*. To start with, for Rotker, Prospero does not represent the colonial power:

> I speak of the colonizer not from the traditional point of view (as the foreign powers), but as the white elite (Prospero) who (with the help of little Ariels) subjugates the Other, holding him in servitude as if by natural right. Or simply making him disappear. (25)

Thus, the Prospero of the pampas is the white elite of the country that appears in the novel indirectly, in the shape of English culture that was adopted so vigorously and is submitted by the narrator to a subjective critique. By attacking the British instead of the elite, however, Iparraguirre leaves Argentina intact, allowing room for the possibility of a new start. Omoy-lume is decidedly Caliban, although he is not monstrous but beautiful in his primitiveness and natural state. Nor is he the revolutionary of Fernández Retamar's vision. The moment of Jack Guevara's farewell when Omoy-lume throws away his clothes and stands naked to return Jack's wave symbolizes the rejection of the artificiality of the European or Europeanized culture that was imposed on him. Omoy-lume's disappearance over the horizon also symbolizes the slow but inevitable end of the

Indigenous people of Argentina. Finally, Jack may be seen as Ariel, but he is quite different too and to understand him it is crucial to take Miranda into consideration.

In *The Tempest*, Prospero takes revenge on his enemies by marrying his daughter to Fernando, the son of a king so that Miranda becomes a queen. This way the future of Prospero's lineage is secured and he restores his family to the situation it enjoyed before his exile. The appearance of Fernando re-establishes an equilibrium from which the old order is confirmed. Rotker remarks:

> Shakespeare imports Fernando to the island almost as if he has fallen from the sky, as if to preclude the possibility that Miranda might in reality have inherited the island, sharing a bed and power with the horrendous Caliban: the foundational myth of national linages would not accept it. To cohabit with the legitimate, native ruler would have implied considering him an equal and, in consequence, questioning not only the superiority of the whites, but also the very logic that allows some to dominate others. In *The Tempest* nothing seems more natural than slavery. (26)

The colonial dynamic between Prospero and Miranda present in *The Tempest* that Rotker has exposed could be seen for example in the Fidel López' *La novia del hereje* discussed in chapter two. The protagonist was the daughter of the members of the white elite who married an Englishman so that her class could eventually take its revenge on Spain and obtain their emancipation. In Iparraguirre's novel, however, the figure of Guevara's companion, Graciana, who would correspond to Miranda, is a radically different creature. She is what Rotker would call a "Miranda of reality" whom Prospero would probably never recognize. She is a woman of the frontier, a beautiful but illiterate *mestiza*, one corrupted by Caliban's blood. However, this is where Ariel comes in, in the person of Jack Guevara, who in Iparraguirre's version has lost the elitism with which Rodó endowed him. Through his account of history, Guevara represents a new and

modern sensibility characterized by inclusion. He is respectful towards barbarism, includes it in his account of the past, and appreciates it. Despite the fact that he does not fully comprehend Omoy-lume, i.e. Caliban, he acknowledges him and considers him part of his own heritage. More importantly, Jack Guevara writes history not for the English Admiralty, nor for the elites of his own country, but for Graciana, his companion. This way the national memory is left in the hands of a woman who will decide the future of the manuscript and its use. Guevara decides to write history but reformulates it in such a way that it includes the *desaparecido* of the nineteenth century, acknowledges his/her existence in the national heritage, and lays claim to the other disappeared of history. In *La tierra del fuego,* Prospero does not take his revenge on the naked, smiling Omoy-lume or, by extension, on all those excluded from Argentinean history.

Chapter IV

Patria versus *patria*:

Ese manco Paz by Andrés Rivera

Public versus Private

> I remember a night near Bahia, when I was enveloped in a firework display of phosphorescent fireflies; their pale lights glowed, went out, shone again, all without piercing the night with any true illumination. So it is with events; beyond their glow darkness prevails.
>
> (Fernand Braudel)

The principle of inclusion characteristic of the Argentinean new historical novel shows an attitude toward history similar in some ways to that derived from theories developed by the French *Annales* School promoted by Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel, Jacques Le Goff, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and Marc Ferro. According to those scholars, history that concentrates exclusively on particular kinds of events, especially military and political, offers a very limited glimpse of the past. Braudel proposed a new way of studying history and rejected the idea of the priority of certain aspects of the past over others. For him, "the meaning of objects, events and individual actions lies not in the things themselves, but in the relationships we construct between them" (Hughes-Warrington 18). The interest of the historian, he proposes, should embrace a broad spectrum of interconnected aspects of human activity that constitutes our past and also our existence in the present.

As a response to the limitations of historiography focused on the evolution of humanity from the point of view of political events, scholars associated with the *Annales*

School proposed a kind of historical narrative that presented history from below. Instead of concentrating on politically or economically important events and the history of kings and queens, they concentrated on the perspectives of ordinary individuals within society, as well as individuals and places that were not previously considered historically important. The type of analysis they proposed may be seen in *A History of Private Life* (1987) edited by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby and produced under the influence of Le Roy Ladurie. This five-volume study, covering French history from antiquity to modern times, focuses on subjects such as the daily life of citizens; social and individual attitudes towards the human body; the evolution of the concepts of modesty, loneliness, and friendship; the development of home decorating, taste, humor, and the need for a domestic private space; different ways of socializing, and the meaning of the family for the individual. *A History of Private Life*, therefore, creates a narrative about the past centered on the intimate relation of individuals with their surroundings.

The ambitious project proposed by the *Annales* School illuminates the past in a radically different way from traditional historiography. It shifts attention from the public life of elites to the private sphere of ordinary people, from chronicles of nations to stories about individuals. This approach not only offers a refreshing perspective on the past but also changes the scope and role of historiography. In history from below, importance is given to the daily life of people rather than to overarching ideologies and political movements which in a more traditional historiography are the domain of political classes. Ideologies and politics still have their place, but the past is viewed primarily from the perspective of the personal experiences of common individuals. Since history is a narrative that also chronicles the essence of humanity, this type of historiography

redefines the idea of humanity itself as a phenomenon whose importance is located in micro-events, family life, and, ultimately, the basic character of human social condition. Although the recent historical novel in Argentina was not written in a way that implements exactly the practices of the *Annales* historians, it was written in the spirit of the climate they fostered, as we shall see.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Sylvia Iparraguirre's *La tierra del fuego* is a novel that reverses nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Argentinean historiographic and literary tradition. Instead of presenting the past from the exclusionary perspective of a dominant discourse, Iparraguirre's novel re-models traditional historiography to include the Yamana people in it, at the same time as she enters the world of micro-histories that were also beginning to figure as part of Argentina's past. *La tierra del fuego* is far from being the only example of re-writing of history from the perspective of groups, both ethnic and otherwise, that had hitherto been omitted from national narratives. *La amante del Restaurador* (1993) by María Esther de Miguel, for example, and *La princesa federal* (1998), *Una mujer de fin de siglo* (1999), and *Finisterre* (2005), by María Rosa Lojo, all explore history from the point of view of women. In a different vein entirely, *Ansay o los infortunios de la gloria* (1984), by Martín Caparrós, tells the story of an officer of the Royalist army that confronted the patriots during the Wars of Independence, a perspective seldom embraced for evident reasons.

The idea of inclusion in contemporary Argentinean literature, should not be limited, however, to the retrieval of the omitted or forgotten stories of a particular ethnic group, gender, or social class. Andrés Rivera is a novelist who presents an original vision of the past that incorporates perspectives on canonical history that had hitherto remained

unexplored and, like the work of the *Annales* School, sheds light on the private rather than public aspect of history even if he does not tell it from below. In *En esta dulce tierra* (1984), *La revolución es un sueño eterno* (1987), *El amigo de Baudelaire* (1991), *La sierva* (1992), *El farmer* (1996), and *Ese manco Paz* (2003), Rivera reinterprets the nineteenth century, a seminal period in the birth of the nation. In those novels he attempts to displace the "totalitarian" discourse of history through a non-linear and non-monolithic narrative that deconstructs national metanarrative. Rivera's novels shift the center of narration from the glorious deeds of the people who created the nation to a view of their sexuality, illnesses, old age and loss of power, scatology, and death itself. As Vanessa Guibert Heitner notes in her study of *La revolución es un sueño eterno*, in Rivera's narratives, the authority of historical heroes gained by conventional historiography is diminished by humanizing them in a way that emphasizes their mortality and confronts some of the major figures of Argentinean history with their own death:

> As we have suggested earlier, the authority of historical heroes is garnered largely by the inorganic aesthetics of conventional historiography, which exclude the details of bodily humors and excretions. The historical figure is generally clean and consequently, from Rivera's perspective, quite two-dimensional. It follows logically that if the inorganic, clean projections of historical novels (such as Felix Luna's *Soy Roca*) are designed to cultivate a sense of lasting exemplarity and/or figurative immortality, then the violation of that tradition is designed to achieve mortality, and as an inevitable consequence: death. (288)

In Rivera's narratives the great heroes of the nation are presented in intimate situations that destroy the idealized image of them and convert them into more commonplace human beings. In this respect, he follows the trail already blazed by Alejo Carpentier's view of Colombus in *El arpa y la sombra* (1979) or Gabriel García Márquez's account of the last days of Simón Bolívar in *El general en su laberinto* (1989). In both novels the

historical figures, Columbus and Bolívar, are faced with death and inspired to review and re-evaluate their lives, a context also used by Rivera, as we shall see. As in the works by Carpentier and García Márquez, an original vision of the past emerges from Rivera's novels written against traditional historiography. His version of history depicts its protagonists from the point of view of their weaknesses and vulnerability and questions the mythologizing aspects of history on which the nation-state bases its legitimacy. Moreover, his way of presenting the past opens new possibilities with which the nation may identify: if the stories of political battles and conflicts are stripped of their luster, it may be possible to formulate a legitimizing narrative that escapes the traditional hostilities and dichotomies endemic to Argentinean politics.

It may be argued, as has been shown in the case of *La tierra del fuego*, that the historical novel of the post-dictatorship period in Argentina projects an optimistic vision because it embraces new ethnic, gender, and political perspectives. In spite of its critical attitude towards national history, in the sense that the novel argues in favor of the need to reshape historical discourse, it does not reject that discourse entirely. In novels like Iparraguirre's, conventional historiography still offers a point of reference for new formulations of the past and provides room for the presentation of points of view traditionally absent in official versions. A close analysis of historical discourse in novels that include non-hegemonic perspectives, such as *La tierra del fuego*, can be perceived as an effort to create a reformed view of history from which to generate the basis for a future multicultural, pluralistic, and egalitarian Argentinean society. The manner in which history is written, however, does not fundamentally change: it remains a coherent

and fundamentally linear narrative that operates through the use of certain tropes characteristic of historical discourse.

Rivera's work, on the other hand, suggests that if history is to be reformulated it should be based on entirely new principles. If historiography was founded on an inorganic and artificial aesthetic construct that does not correspond to the animal nature of the human being defined by his/her biology, then Rivera undermines the aesthetic value of this construct in his novels and proposes a new form of historiography conditioned by the private and personal aspects of life of the main protagonists of history. The following fragment from *Ese manco Paz*, the novel to be analyzed in this chapter, will illustrate the point:

> ¿Qué es lavar platos, Paz?
>
> ¿Cómo es limpiarle los mocos y los pañales a sus hijos, Paz?
>
> ¿Cómo es morirme un poco mucho para siempre cuando uno de sus hijos muere, Paz?
>
> ¿Cómo es vivir con un hombre que sabe reír, y que entra allí donde sea que nos protege un techo, y se queda mirándome, y que me mira todo el tiempo que me le dura, entre los labios, un cigarrito brasilero, y después se va?
>
> ¿Cómo es escuchar el paso de su caballo, Paz, cuando usted se va? ¿Con lágrimas o sin lágrimas? ¿Con el corazón y la boca sin sangre, y la sangre detenida no sé dónde en mi cuerpo?
>
> ¿Cómo es escuchar el paso de su caballo, Paz, hasta que dejo de escucharlo, y me quedo sola, y recuerdo su sonrisa, sola, y huelo las cacas de sus hijos, sola?
>
> ¿Cómo que hay hortensias bajo todos los techos del exilio que nos cobijaron?
>
> ¿Cómo es tomar el desayuno sola?
>
> ¿Cómo es esperar que golpeen la puerta de donde sea que nos instalamos sus hijos y yo, y me lo traigan a usted, Paz, la chaqueta agujerada por una bala, o por dos o por tres, y dejen su cuerpo sobre la mesa de la cocina, y nos miremos, usted y yo, todas las respuestas prohibidas en nuestras gargantas?
>
> Ésas son mis batallas, general Paz, en un país sin salvación.
>
> ¿Qué nombres tendrán esas batallas, general Paz?

¿Qué ríos poderosos hay a mis espaldas?
¿Qué se juega en esas batallas, general Paz?
[...]
Y puchero, Paz. Puchero flaco, Paz. Puchero flaco, Paz, cuando termino de limpiar pisos ajenos, y me tiran unas monedas en pago, y escucho, a los patrones de turno murmurar *ésa es la esclava del manco. Rubia, la esclava... La importó de Escocia, tierra de herejes... Hombre de buen ojo,* el manco... *Pero es demasiado joven para él, y alguien va a soplarle la dama todo servicio.* (79-81; original emphasis)

In this fragment, the voice of Margarita Weild, the wife of General Paz, questions the priorities given to subjects that eventually will become part of national history. She opposes history that is a history of battles, a history based on political events, with a series of questions about more mundane matters, drawing attention to what he did not take into consideration in his writing. The history she talks about is a narrative of the private life that unfolded at the same time as his celebrated battles. The past she alludes to is composed of moments attending to daily life, washing dishes, taking care of children, changing diapers, the hardships of single parenting, the loneliness of a single mother while her husband is fighting the war, the mourning of a child, the loneliness and anguish provoked by insecurity, and the eternal possibility of losing her husband. Her past was filled with long periods of anxiety in anticipation of the prospect that one day he might be returned to her, not as a hero and abstract ideal, the famous and invincible General Paz, but as a bullet-ridden body on the kitchen table, the center of her private life. Her fear of his death is completely stripped of any sense other than its biological meaning: she will not be able to be with him or speak to him. There is no happy afterlife when she will be reunited with Paz, only the inevitability of non-existence represented by the cold body that will occupy the space where the family shares food and time together. The political is confronted here with a very intimate side of human life. The past that

Margarita vindicates is reduced to the *puchero*, a simple soup she ate in times of despair, a meal that both represents everyday family life and its deficiencies and the humiliations she suffered during Paz's "patriotic" absences. This is the history that counts for her and refers to the most basic and primitive aspects of human existence.

The formulation of history that Rivera proposes provides an alternative to national narratives that had become the ideological background for the political conflicts that ravaged the country. A freelance journalist, Patrick Symmes, traveling in Argentina in the 1990s observed that the "Dirty War" of the 1970s and 80s opposed groups that were somehow one. In comparison with other Latin American countries, Argentinean society was homogenous but ideologically opposed to each other:

> In Argentina, [...], it was a particularly intimate form of cruelty that had filled these holes... the Argentineans had avoided the race-triggered wars of Peru or Guatemala, where a brown underclass fought against a social order controlled by whites. The Mexicans and Brazilians had suffered, but across divides of class. The rich in Nicaragua lost their money, the poor their lives. But here the killers and the killed were somehow one. The most racially homogeneous, middle-class society in Latin America had murdered itself. (17)

The ideological conflict had its origin in Argentina in the times of the foundation of the country, became increasingly complex through the years, and erupted in all its fury in the 1970s. The driving force behind the violence was a particular ideology and tradition, an aesthetic construct which provided the legitimacy for the most atrocious acts committed in the name of the *patria*. Once again, the case of Captain Scilingo comes to mind. However he might be judged, he presented himself as a believer in a national cause, which, according to him, justified his crimes and absolved him of responsibility.

In *Ese manco Paz* Rivera goes back to the nineteenth century when the groups opposing each other could still be divided into two main factions and retells the story of the conflict in a way that avoids the narrative structures that had driven the nation to self-perpetuating violence. For this reason, he concentrates on the private lives of the main historical figures. Although Rivera still writes about historical protagonists of the nineteenth century, General Paz and Juan Manuel de Rosas, the disclosure of their private lives changes the perception that is given to the past, demythologizes national heroes, and proposes a different narrative that emphasizes elements of the past that cannot be used so easily to legitimize violence.

¿Dónde está la patria?

The novel *Ese manco Paz* opens in Buenos Aires after the fall of the dictator Rosas in 1852 with the reminiscences of General José María Paz y Haedo (1791-1854) about the role of ideals in the creation of the nation, as he reviews the *Memoirs* he wrote during the seven years of captivity he suffered first at the hands of Estanislao López (1786-1838), the Federalist caudillo of Santa Fe province, and then Rosas' own prisons. At the very beginning of his examination, he stops at a question noted as a quotation from Salvador María del Carril (1798-1883): *¿Dónde está la patria?* Where is the fatherland?

This uncertainty about *patria* can be understood as an expression of longing for a lost homeland, especially since the question was originally pronounced at the time when Del Carril accompanied Paz into exile. They were both fugitives from their own country, Argentina, which remained in the hands of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793-1877) and it is imaginable that they were simply homesick. Del Carril is described by Paz as "el dueño

de un idioma lujoso, de una palabra deslumbrante [...] de una de las lenguas más poderosas del país" (15). He was an erudite Liberal, a Unitarian, and one of the members of the convention that voted for the Constitution of 1853. He represented the intellectual elite that eventually gave legal definition to Argentina as a nation after the defeat of Juan Manuel de Rosas and the establishment of the Liberal government. Moreover, in the context of the novel, the question is repeated in the present of the narrator when he resides in the capital as a celebrated citizen. As such, "¿Dónde está la patria?" expresses much more than the disquiet of two exiles. It can be understood metaphorically as a reference to different concepts of the nation formulated in Argentina in the nineteenth century, which constitutes one of the central motifs of the novel. In some respects it also refers us to the sentiments expressed in the epigraph attached to the Introduction to this dissertation.

The nineteenth century is particularly important in Argentinean history and is known as the foundational period of the nation. The emancipation from Spain, the Civil War opposing Unitarians and Federalists, Rosas's dictatorship, and the return to power of the Unitarians form the mythical period of struggle that made Argentina an independent country. As Nicolas Shumway explains (x-xi), the period between 1808 and 1880 corresponds to the time when the country's guiding fictions and rhetorical paradigms, which continue to shape and inform the country's actions and self-image, were invented by intellectuals such as Mariano Moreno, José Artigas, Bartolomé Hidalgo, Juan Bautista Alberdi, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and Bartolomé Mitre.

From the very beginning of Argentinean history, the formulation of nationhood was subject to debates on how to organize the newly emancipated country that gave rise to a

> particularly divisive mind-set created by the country's nineteenth-century intellectuals who first framed the idea of Argentina. This ideological legacy is in some sense a mythology of exclusion rather than a unifying national ideal, a recipe for divisiveness rather than consential pluralism. This failure to create an ideological framework for union helped produce what novelist Ernesto Sábato has called "a society of opposers" as interested in humiliating each other as in developing a viable nation united through consensus and compromise. (Shumway x-xi)

In the nineteenth century the specific intellectual framework in which the nation was to be inscribed led to the conflict between two political factions, the Unitarians and Federalists, whom Shumway defines as follows:

> In a sense, Argentine society from the very first days of independence appeared to be built on a seismic fault. [...]
>
> On one side of the fault were the Morenista elite, youthful dreamers who wanted to make their own country a showplace for Western civilization. In politics they supported a strong unified government centered in Buenos Aires, a position that later identified them as Unitarians. [...] They came from the upper classes who lived off their rents and educated children in Europe. They lived looking northward, reading French and English authors, and believing, like José Arcadio Buendía of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, that Culture had to be imported. And they were ashamed of the backward Argentine provinces with their caudillo leaders and illiterate, mixed-blood gauchos. [...] they spoke grandly of the eventual formation of a democratic republic and gave lip service to Enlightenment notions of universal equality and brotherhood. But theirs was a particularly antidemocratic democracy whose leaders were more philosopher princes than representatives drawn from the people.
>
> On the other side of the fault was the motley opposition to Morenismo, [...] who distrusted the porteño intellectual elite and often felt more comfortable with the personalist government centered in a king, dictator, or caudillo than with an institutional government [...]. The provincial Criollistas feared porteño hegemony and generally supported provincial autonomy, a position that later identified them as Federalists. Moreover, they maintained a paternalistic interest in the lower classes, feared foreign

> political and economic involvements, and sympathized with provincial concerns. (44-45)

Ese manco Paz is a novel that revisits this celebrated period of conflict between Unitarians and Federalist that became the blueprint for subsequent confrontations of political factions in Argentina. In particular, it focuses, as I have already mentioned, on the life of General Paz y Haedo whose involvement with the Republic was of a different nature than that of Del Carril, the companion in exile whose question about *la patria* had prompted the general's speculations. Paz was a military man who fought in the name of the Unitarians for the realization of the highest ideals associated with the concept of *patria*. Now, at an advanced age, when the Republic is established and he is revered by the inhabitants of Buenos Aires, he repeats Del Carril's question, "¿Dónde está la patria?", because the ideal of Argentina that he defended so tirelessly and valiantly over forty years of combat is confronted with an unsatisfactory reality. From the perspective of a bitter, handicapped old man reviewing his memoirs, he realizes that the dream has turned to disappointment. The question "¿Dónde está la patria?" is now understood to ask "What is Argentina?" or perhaps more poignantly after so many years in combat: "How is it possible to formulate a country whose history will avoid the dichotomy that has fuelled conflicts since its inception?"

Paz versus Rosas

As described in history books, Paz resembles in many ways the fictional character Colonel Aureliano Buendía from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by García Márquez. Fierce in combat, feared by his enemies, incorruptible and always true to his political

cause, Paz was an epic figure of Argentinean military history who proved to be, on more than one occasion, a brilliant leader and strategist. He distinguished himself as a young officer of the Northern Army during the Wars of Independence where he fought alongside General Manuel Belgrano (1770-1820). During that campaign the loss of his left arm in combat earned him the nickname "el manco" Paz, "one-arm" Paz. After the Wars of Independence, he fought in the war against Brazil (1825-1828) and was named Commander General for his exploits on the battlefield. When that war was over, he led numerous campaigns against local caudillos who revolted against the central government. He defeated Juan Bautista Bustos (1799-1830), caudillo of Córdoba, and then, on two different occasions, the legendary caudillo of La Rioja province, Facundo Quiroga (1788-1835). In 1831, Paz fell prisoner of Estanislao López, who kept him in captivity for four years before handing him over to Juan Manuel de Rosas for a further three years of imprisonment in Luján. Rosas ordered López to execute Paz but his orders were never carried out. Paz was released in 1839 and, fearing for his life, escaped to Montevideo. One year later, he rejoined the Unitarians under the command of Juan Lavalle and organized new forces in Corrientes, which defeated Pascual Echagüe (1797-1867), caudillo of Entre Ríos. However, after his victories in Corrientes, Paz was not given adequate political and military support, and had to withdraw his troops and return, yet again, to exile. Back in Montevideo, Paz successfully commanded the defense of the city against a siege by Manuel Oribe. In 1842, Paz returned to Corrientes to fight Rosas' army. After battling Justo José de Urquiza (1801-1870), later president of Argentina, Paz was forced to retreat to Entre Ríos and then to Paraguay and Brazil, where he lived in poverty as a farmer. When Urquiza rebelled against Rosas (1852), Paz was named

Brigadier General and returned to Buenos Aires. At the end of his life, he was elected a member of Congress and in his last political act expressed his disapproval of the document naming Buenos Aires an independent province. As can be seen, José María Paz spent much of his life in the saddle actively fighting for the Unitarian cause in the endless civil wars that followed the emancipation of Argentina.

Rosas was certainly a match for Paz. He was a comparably successful military commander and an extraordinary man for his times. He started his military career as a teenager and engaged in combat during the English invasions (1806, 1807). He was victorious in all his confrontations against the Unitarians, led several successful military campaigns against the Ranqueles Indians, and impressively resisted two European blockades and interventions. Contrary to Paz, however, Rosas was also the owner of a vast and thriving ranch and a brilliant politician whose astute political maneuvers in alliances with provincial caudillos eventually allowed him to take control of the entire country. After 1828, he was the most powerful man in Argentina and is probably best known as the *Restaurador de las Leyes en la Provincia de Buenos Aires*, a title that gave him dictatorial powers over the country from 1834 to 1852 when he was defeated in Caseros by the army of Justo José de Urquiza. During his dictatorship, Rosas managed to consolidate the United Provinces to an unprecedented degree, laying the foundations of modern Argentina, but at the price of a reign of terror sustained through his infamous secret police known as *la mazorca*. Tulio Halperín Donghi portrays him as follows:

> Rosas was the only Federalist chief to assimilate the lessons of recent turmoil and create a style of rule adapted to the new conditions of political life. He correctly recognized that the mobilization of large portions of the population in antagonistic factions had become irreversible and that political stability depended on the total victory of one party over the others. Until

> then, the parties in conflict lacked internal cohesion. Although strong enough to disrupt the rule of their adversaries, none had shown itself able to maintain order once in power. Rosas set out to build a disciplined organization capable of doing just that. Intensive use of mass propaganda played a key role, ranging from relatively sophisticated journalistic debate to an enforcement of public political conformity in which people, churches, and even horses were required to display the insignia of Federalism. (110)

In addition to his status as an important historical figure, Rosas survives in the national culture through Sarmiento's *Facundo*. As Gabriela B. Cittadini observes (478), Sarmiento contextualized the character of Rosas in a manner that was useful for his own political agenda. Although Sarmiento acknowledges Rosas' political skills, he presents him as the incarnation of evil. He is a tyrant and a despot from which the nation should defend itself:

> el hábil político que en Buenos Aires ha elevado a sistema estos procedimientos, los ha refinado y hecho producir efectos maravillosos. Por ejemplo, desde 1835 hasta 1840, casi toda la ciudad de Buenos Aires ha pasado por las cárceles. Había a veces, ciento cincuenta ciudadanos que permanecían presos [...] seis meses. ¿Por qué?, ¿qué habían hecho?..., ¿qué habían dicho? ¡Imbéciles!: ¿no veis que está disciplinando la ciudad? ¡[...] en 1844, podrá presentar al mundo, un pueblo que no tiene sino un pensamiento, una opinión, una voz, un entusiasmo sin límites por la persona y por la voluntad de Rosas! (94)

Above all, Sarmiento sought to generate resistance to Rosas and thought it necessary to explain the dictator if he was to have any success. For this reason, as Sarmiento's essay progresses, Rosas becomes a more understandable figure whose actions are attributed to a nature that arises from barbarism. According to Sarmiento, who created an image of Rosas that has persisted in Argentinean culture and beyond, the dictator was naturally and inevitably wicked because he was a caudillo. Natural circumstances explained why Rosas could use terms such as "evil", "justice", and "order" in the same discourse in contexts that otherwise made their juxtaposition difficult to accept.

Both men, Paz and Rosas, are legendary figures in Argentinean history who captivated the imagination of the nation and were presented as desirable models. In his novel, however, Rivera has abandoned this vision of national heroes and founding fathers in favor of a much more vulnerable image.

"La República" versus "La estancia"

In *Ese manco Paz* Rivera refers to history and to an historical analysis of the political situation of nineteenth-century Argentina in a way that relies on the reader's knowledge of the epoch. It is impossible to understand the novel fully without knowing Argentinean history, the nature of the conflict between Unitarians and Federalists, and the historical figures fictionalized in the narrative. The organization of historical material in the novel is not linear and does not resemble conventional historical discourse in any way. It is divided into seven sections titled "La República" and six sections titled "La estancia", which are rigorously alternated as the novel progresses. The titles refer, in the first instance, to the geographical places where Paz and Rosas reside at the end of their lives. The sections titled "La República" refer to Buenos Aires where Paz lived after 1852, while the headings of sections titled "La estancia" allude to the farm near Southampton, England, where Rosas lived in exile after his defeat at Caseros in 1852 until his death in 1877.

The titles given to the sections of the novel also indicate ideological spaces and the political vision of the country held by Unitarians and Federalists and represented by Paz and Rosas respectively. The ideological positions of both factions are not systematically elaborated in the novel but are woven into the text of the narrative and are

represented in the titles given to the two kinds of sections mentioned above. Thus the sections titled "La República", corresponding to Paz in the novel, suggest the democratic vision that the Unitarians had for the country derived from foreign models and imposed from above. Such models are exemplified by the project for a legal system based on theories elaborated by European liberals such as Jeremy Bentham, which Bernardino Rivadavia, the first Unitarian president of Argentina, endeavored to implement. Jeremy Adelman, who analyzed the development of legal systems in Argentina, notes:

> Bentham [...] believed in the idea of a great foundational code to embody a complete and systematic model of public and private law. [...] Rivadavia was Bentham's most devout follower and calibrated most of his legislative agenda to the rationalist precepts of his tutor – including a deep faith in the unilateral power of law to shape society, an aversion to United States-style federalism, and a preference for representative institutions. (98)

The concept embodied in the title "La República", therefore, alludes to an idealized and theoretical model for the Argentinean nation that would align the country with Europe through its legal system.

In contrast to the vision of "La República", the sections of the novel titled "La estancia" reflect the Federalist vision and especially that of Rosas and his government. His well known charisma was imposed on all aspects of public and private life, so that the country was indeed governed like a ranch, as the title of the sections of the novel dedicated to Rosas suggest. His vision of Argentina was not of a society of systematic laws but one ruled by dictatorially issued decrees. Adelman comments on its legal dimension:

> Rosas and his filial type ruled through an incomplete (not absent) legal order. Rosas preferred to issue and enforce executive decrees rather than champion constitutional order *tout court*. In so doing, he balked at the precommitment powers of a constitution – the ability to integrate social

> actors into a series of meta rules and regulations that would provide stability, accountability, and credibility to public and private rights. His power rested in the rule of quasi-law: sanctions and dictates of an unstable state bereft of deep legitimacy and lacking an accepted covering law for public affairs, even while the state enforced particular laws governing the concerns of civil society. (112)

The title "La estancia" thus represents the way of perceiving the state characteristic of the Federalists, whose majority were caudillo landowners. The nation was to be organized like a ranch with a strong *patrón* or boss such as Rosas, a leader with a paternalistic approach to the poor workers of the *estancia,* or, in other words, to the citizens of the State. In this vision, ideals derived from Europe are confronted with the reality of rural Argentina and rejected.

As already mentioned, the "La República" and "La estancia" sections are alternated, representing, to a certain extent, the coexistence of the two political visions in the first half of the nineteenth century and, by extension, throughout Argentinean history. However, this alternation does not reflect the succession in power of the two protagonists and the factions they represent and does not correspond to any rules of chronology or linear coherence. As we shall show Rivera's novel organizes his view on history in a different way.

History versus Memory

Instead of telling the story of the confrontation between Paz and Rosas in an ordered fashion, similar to a historical text with a linear narration and chronological narrative, Rivera proposes a fragmented and apparently chaotic structure. The first "La República" section consists of ten fragments, all narrated in the first person singular except for the

last one, where the voice of the narrator is uncertain, and corresponds to places in the novel where the construction of the narrator is unclear as if aiming to confuse the reader, although it also anticipates other aspects of the narrative, as will be seen in due course. In the first fragment (13) Paz reflects on his nine years of incarceration[24], initially at the hands of Estanislao López and then in Rosas' jails, through a text he wrote while in prison. The motif of imprisonment is pursued in the second fragment (13-14), where he also alludes to conversations with his Unitarian friend, Salvador María del Carril, mentions his own memoirs again, talks about the process of growing old, and expresses his doubts about the purpose of the May Revolution and emancipation from Spain. The third fragment (14) opens with Paz's review of the kind of statistical information about war he has written in his memoirs and concludes with a brief comment about the corrupt state of the country. In the fourth fragment (15), Paz reminisces further about Del Carril and then comments bitterly about his lost arm. The fifth fragment (15) contains memories of exile in which Paz recalls his hardship as an outcast and Del Carril's formulation of the question "¿Dónde está la patria?" The next fragment (15-16) is composed of questions directed to Margarita Weild expressing Paz's longing for his deceased wife which continues into fragment seven (16), consisting only of a single question. In the eighth fragment, Paz reminisces about the destitution of exile and remembers that he never answered Del Carril's question. Fragment nine (16-17) deals with Paz's impressions of Buenos Aires from two separate time periods, his present situation, when he is adored and smothered by the elite, and the past, when he was a prisoner in the city

[24] José María Paz actually spent seven years imprisoned by his political adversaries but this period is extended to nine in Rivera's text.

that venerated Rosas. Finally, the last fragment (18-19) of this section, apparently spoken by third person describes Rosas in Buenos Aires, adored by the elite and writing decrees to govern the country.

As may be seen, although certain ideas are repeated, there is no overall thematic unity or chronological continuity between the fragments that form this section. Only a second reading reveals that there is an element of thematic continuity between some fragments: the first and second fragments end and begin respectively with the subject of incarceration; the fourth and fifth have the experience of exile and discussion of the question "¿Dónde está la patria?" in common; the sixth and seventh are concerned with Margarita Weild and both are formulated as questions; and ninth and tenth focus on the power and presence of Rosas during his rule.

When we turn to the formal structure of the first "La estancia" section, we find that, as a composite of a number of apparently unrelated fragments – eight in this case – it shares some of the characteristics of the first "La República" section on which we have already commented. The first of the fragments is a third person narrative that also seems to continue where the preceding section of the novel ended. Its opening sentence: "El hombre rubio, alto, sano, hermoso, les escribía *el país es una estancia*" (23; original emphasis) repeats almost verbatim a description of Rosas we have already encountered and will find again (see 18, 23, 27, 28). This opening sentence, the narrative voice, and the description of Rosas as the text continues are enough to delude the reader into believing momentarily that there is narrative continuity between "La República" and "La estancia." But the idea is not sustained. The first fragment of this "La estancia" section serves mainly to establish Rosas as its main subject and the subject of subsequent "La

estancia" sections, confirming in this instance his view of the country as an *estancia* and a place to be governed as if it were.

In the second fragment of the first "La estancia" section (24), the narrative changes to a first person voice that is sustained for the next three fragments. We assume it belongs to Rosas, who reflects on a conversation with Nicolás de Anchorena, his Federalist friend and a member of one of the wealthiest families in the country. In this fragment, Rosas restates ideas about governance that he expressed in letters to Facundo Quiroga, the rebellious caudillo of La Rioja province, in which he emphasizes the notions of order and respect for the federal government as a guarantee of national prosperity. In the third fragment (25) Rosas describes how he cultivated his image among the popular classes by mingling with them in one of the poor districts of Buenos Aires. In the fourth fragment (25) he again refers to Nicolás de Anchorena and reminds his friend about the relationship between Anchorena's fortune and the source of his own power in popular support. The fifth fragment (25-27), represents a return to the third person but also involves dialogue for the first time. The narrative refers first to Manuela, Rosas' daughter, who is fascinated by the physique of her father, and then to the perfection of Rosas's letters, a quality they share with Sarmiento's writings. As the text turns then to a dialogue between father and daughter, Rosas refers to Paz, whom he deeply despises, comparing him negatively to the self-aggrandizing image he has of himself. The following fragment (28-30) is also a mix of narrative discourse and character dialogue, during which Rosas explains the difference between the English and the Irish to his daughter. The narration also dwells, once again, on the physical attraction Manuela feels for her father and a reciprocal perception of her by Rosas, within which are woven

repeated comments about Manuela's obesity. Finally, the last fragment (30-31) of this section characterizes Manuela as the successor of her mother at Rosas' side and as a member of the Buenos Aires elite whose wealth defines Argentina.

Like the first "La República" section, the first "La estancia" section has no apparent unity. Its fragments are of unequal length and address different topics through different narrative perspectives, as I have shown. As in the first "La República" section the linear development of the fragments in relation to each other seems haphazard. The thematic randomness typical of the relation among the fragments within each of the first two sections of the novel also characterizes the relationship between the sections themselves. There is no apparent overall thematic continuity even if certain topics are repeated. Although the image of Rosas at the end of the first "La República" section is taken up at the beginning of the first "La estancia" section, suggesting narrative continuity or unity, the possibility is not pursued and other sections of the novel are not similarly connected. The second "La República" section (35-41) focuses on General Paz in his youth and his relationship with Manuel Belgrano, none of which is in any sense mirrored in the corresponding second "La estancia" section, where the focus is on the writing of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and the idea of progress he popularized (45-46). The discontinuity is especially apparent in the fifth "La estancia" section (103-05) where Paz is referred to as dead and Rosas comments are presented from the perspective of a point in time that came after the events and narrative time of the sixth "La República" section that follows. In effect, the reader is never allowed to become comfortable. Just as the reader gets used to a text focused on Paz and his perspective, the narrative flow is

broken by a return to Rosas and by being taken to another time, space, and topic, which is interrupted in turn by the subsequent "La República" section.

The reader is confronted in *Ese manco Paz* not only with the narration of history through apparently disconnected fragments but a panoply of voices that cannot always be identified with certainty and give the impression of a multi-vocal history. The first "La República" section of the novel is told predominantly in a first person identifiable with Paz. However, there is some ambiguity in the ninth fragment. In its first four paragraphs the person of Paz is clearly evident in the first person pronouns and verb forms, but these markers are absent from the last two paragraphs, as if Paz had suddenly removed himself from his own speech and adopted the perspective of a third person to describe the Federalist "dueños de Buenos Aires" (17) of the time of his imprisonment. The shift seems to anticipate what is to come in the tenth fragment, where the same third person voice continues, dwelling on the inhabitants of Buenos Aires of an earlier time and describing how Rosas exercised his authority. It is impossible to determine, whether this fragment is spoken by Paz or by an anonymous third person. The ambiguity, however, foreshadows further shifts that occur as the novel develops. The next section of the novel, the first "La estancia" section, contains third person voices, as well as the first person voice of Rosas, and it also includes dialogue. Later sections introduce other voices, including those of Facundo Quiroga (48-53) and Margarita Weild (78-81), speaking autonomously, unsubordinated to other voices. And there are occasions when a character addresses himself in the second person, causing the reader some momentary hesitation about just exactly who is speaking, as in the following lines:

Usted no tiene nada, *Paz*.

No tiene mujer que *le* entibie los fríos de *su* vejez. Y *usted no tiene ni quiere* otros consuelos.

Veamos, *Paz*: *usted tiene* dos camisas, un par de pantalones, un par de zapatos, una chaqueta, un poncho, *sus* botas de guerra, un par de pistolas. *Tiene* una caja de cigarros brasileros.

Tiene apetito, *Paz*.

Tiene apetitos, *Paz*.

No tiene un centavo ahorrado, *Paz*. Ni para pagar *su* entierro.

Tiene buena memoria, *Paz*, todavía. (112-13, emphasis mine)

History in *Ese manco Paz* is reconstructed through fragmentation, randomness and narrative ruptures that emphasize the lack of a logical sequence among the different sections of the novel. Moreover, the same kind of structural organization is employed at a lesser level within each section where the narrative does not amount to a story, but is a collection of randomly presented memories and divagations about the past. There is no evident connection based on cause and effect, no chronology, and no plot. This principle of fragmentation is also evident in each fragment of every section of the novel where the fragments themselves are often short, composed of short paragraphs and sentences, and rhetorical questions such that the visual disposition of the text is also fragmentary, as in the following randomly selected example:

¿Cuánto hace que usted Margarita Weild, murió? ¿Seis años? ¿Apenas seis años?

¿Cuánto hace que murieron los pobrecitos que llevé a la guerra? ¿Veinte años? ¿Treinta años? ¿Huesos criollos en tierra criolla?

¿Quiere que el insomnio no lo obligue a la joda, Paz? No olvide, Paz, que usted es argentino.

No, no olvido que soy argentino.

Tampoco olvido que soy Paz.

Y también sé que hay una calumnia que nadie puede inventarme: soy y he sido pobre de toda pobreza. [...] (99)

A narrative technique based on fragmentation at all levels of the text from the point of view of both its structure and thematic content is therefore one of the more salient

features of the novel. Rivera's chaotic representation of history rebels against historiography and its organization of the information of the past into meaningful narratives that explain the origins of the present. In his novel he retrieves the past in a way similar to how it is registered and recalled by memory; hence the unfocused structure and repetitiveness. Indeed, Rivera employs this technique in other novels such as *La sierva*, *El amigo de Baudelaire*, and *El farmer*.

Spirit versus Body

Rivera's unconventional organization of the text does not imply, however, that there are no connections at all between the "La República" and "La estancia" sections. A second look at the content of the first section in each series reveals that within its apparent thematic randomness there are a number of significant motifs. Although Rivera's fragmented and apparently random narration creates the impression that the positions of both Paz and Rosas are independent of each other, in fact, they are interconnected and each other as we alternate between them. In the first sections of "La República" and "La estancia", for example, further examination will show that Paz and Rosas occupy opposite sides with respect to the same issues. Among them are: 1) the writing and editing of Paz's memoirs and Rosas' letters; 2) conversations with friends, such as Del Carril and Anchorena concerning the writings of the two protagonists; 3) an obsession with the body, in Paz's case a sense of incompleteness related to his handicap and in the case of Rosas a self-aggrandizement and an emphasis on his superiority over others; 4) Argentina and the ways it should be administered, reflected in conversations and writings of the two protagonists; 5) significant women: Paz's wife, Margarita Weild, and

Rosas's daughter and wife; 6) Buenos Aires and the inhabitants of the city that form the country's popular classes and elite, both of which ultimately decide who holds power; 7) Paz's obsession with Rosas and vice versa.

Paz's writing expresses his sense of resignation and failure, as illustrated by the first quotation from his memoirs: "*En los pueblos es ya como extranjera la causa de la Patria*" (13; original emphasis). He is equally dissatisfied with what he has written in the account of his life, and considers his efforts unworthy:

> Leo las líneas que acabo de escribir: tienen la frialdad de los datos estadísticos.
>
> Tantos muertos. Tantos heridos. Tantos prisioneros Tanto armamento ocupado. Tantas municiones. Basura. Basura que arrastra el viento de la madrugada. (14)

Rosas, on the contrary, does not share Paz's pessimism and melancholy. He is a man who never doubts his own words and does not hesitate to describe reality just as he sees it. He is self-assured, self-congratulating, and compares himself to Sarmiento, a giant of nineteenth-century Argentinean political thought and literature. His written word has real and palpable consequences:

> El hombre escribía, infatigable [...] el hombre a quien la escritura de lo que fuese no fatigaba. [...] (24)
>
> Yo no escribo al pedo. (24)
>
> Relee, el mejor archivista que, dicen, hayan conocido los argentinos, las líneas que tiene frente a sus ojos y las aprueba, receloso. Mañana, piensa, las reescribiré. Piensa que toda escritura es provisoria. Pero el señor Sarmiento tampoco tacha lo que reescribe. (26-27)

The way that both figures interact with their respective friends also shows their different temperaments and places them on ideologically opposing poles. Paz repeats the question formulated by his friend, "*¿dónde está la patria?*" (15; original emphasis), but

does not answer it. His enquiry is more of a rhetorical nature, to be contemplated in the course of the novel without a definite and weighty conclusion as if inviting discussion. Rosas, on the other hand, leaves no room for discussion in his exchanges with Nicolás de Anchorena and Facundo Quiroga. Placing himself in an intellectually advantageous position, he lectures them both about the reality and the political situation of the country and issues decrees about how to manage it:

> [...] se debe acostumbrar a los pueblos a la obediencia y el respeto a los gobiernos [...]
> ¿Cree, don Nicolás, que yo escribí esas palabras en vano?
> Habrá obediencia y respeto a los que tienen, en este país, o no habrá país, don Nicolás. (24)

The authoritarian attitude of Rosas is reinforced in the first two sections of the novel by the description of his physical appearances. He is "el hombre rubio, alto, sano, hermoso" (23), "el mejor jinete de las pampas argentinas" [...] "el mejor archivista". In every aspect, Rosas is perfect and god-like, in vivid contrast to the handicapped Paz. Although Paz was probably the greatest general that Argentina has seen, Rivera presents him in a moment of weakness. His exploits as the national hero are not narrated, although they are mentioned. Emphasis is placed instead on Paz's debilitated physical condition. He is old and lives in Buenos Aires, a city whose inhabitants smother him with attention but whom he deeply despises. He is also obsessed by his handicap and repeats as in a litany:

> Yo sí tengo cara, pero soy manco.
> Yo sí tengo ojos, pero soy manco.
> Yo sí tengo boca, pero soy manco.
> Cambio verga por mano sana. (15)

As his disability is repeatedly contrasted with the healthy parts of his body, the epithet "manco" he earned in war loses its meaning. It is no longer a badge of honor, as it had been for the British Admiral Horatio Nelson, for example. Nor does "El manco Paz" positively evoke through its homophony with the name of Manco Capac, the mythological king and founder of the Incan kingdom and nation. Instead, its original meaning, "one-arm", "not a whole person", is highlighted. Thus, from the very beginning of the novel, the myth of "el manco" is diminished by the emphasis given by Rivera to the actual disability to which the word refers and the diminished sense of manhood it represents. This deconstruction of the otherwise powerful nickname of the main protagonist of the novel also casts in a different light the hierarchy of values that this historical figure represents. The nation, justice, liberty, and even honor, all ideals for which the wars were fought in Argentina in the nineteenth century, are displaced to the background and replaced by human physiology. The cry of desperation at the end of the fragment quoted above "Cambio verga por mano sana" exemplifies that replacement.

Paz's state of mind confirms the general disenchantment with ideologies and the national cause. While reviewing his memoirs, started in Santa Fe when he was the prisoner of Estanislao López, he wonders about the validity of the principles for which he fought:

> Y patrones, peones, esclavos – satisfechos y complacidos – no necesitaban que nadie – y menos unos tortuosos jacobinos, maldecidos por el Dios que Roma y España nos legó – viniese a cambiarles las dichosas rutinas de sus vidas. (14)

In contrast, Rosas is free of the doubts that haunt Paz because he has a clear and firm vision of the country and reflects it, as mentioned above, in his writing. For him,

Argentina is a ranch and the rules that apply to ranches, such as respect towards landowners and their property, will be implemented at all cost. The novel pictures Rosas as one who envisions breaking in the nation in the same way that a gaucho would break in a horse. In his discourse and posture, there is no room for vacillation or ambiguity. He is a Machiavellian politician who cultivates his image in a way that enables him to manipulate the lower classes that constitute the core of his army and political power:

> Yo reparto alguna sonrisa, en alguna tarde, en algún barrio de negros, de indios, de mestizos, de criollos pobres, de almas condenadas al purgatorio.
>
> Muerdo el borde de alguna empanada, en algún barrio de negros, de indios, de mestizos, de guitarreros, de criollos, de los que van a morir en defensa de mi hacienda. Y chupo el agua de algún mate lavado, y pregunto por la salud de la doña, y su hombre está listo para lo que yo guste mandar. (25)

The opposition between Paz and Rosas is equally evident in their perception of women. Paz speaks to his wife Margarita Weild as to a spirit because she died when relatively young. He addresses questions to her that must, of course, now remain unanswered but, as in the case of his interaction with his friend, Del Carril, there is an assumption of dialogue, even if it cannot be realized. As for Rosas, everything he says and does exudes strength and a brutal, almost animal, decisiveness. And his perception of women conforms to this principle. He relates to women biologically. His daughter is described through her physical features and appetites: "la joven mujer que no rehúye los locros sazonados y el arroz con leche frío frío" (28), "la mujer joven y gorda" (30), with an emphasis on her tendency to obesity. To him she is, first and foremost, a female, in whom he sees a potential object of his biological urges, without acknowledging that such a union would be incestuous:

> Rosas ríe, despacio, erguida la ancha espalda, rasurada la bella cara del macho español, y sin rastros de inquietud o de miedo en la bella cara de macho español, incluidos los ojos. Rosas, que ríe despacio, ríe de las ganas que siente por tener entre sus manos a María Eugenia Castro. Siente esas ganas con Manuela a su lado, y ríe. Sabe por qué ríe. (29)

Both Paz and Rosas developed a relationship with the city and the inhabitants of Buenos Aires which became the bone of contention between Unitarians and Federalists. The faction that controlled Buenos Aires had power over export and import and therefore controlled the rest of the country. Paz and Rosas, however, express their sentiments towards the city according to their personalities. Paz perceives the city with disaffection and an attitude that shows the history he shares with the place. He disdains the city from the perspective of the present when he is celebrated because, in the past, the same *porteños* imprisoned and alienated him:

> Pero yo, todavía, no olvido que los que me agasajan, hoy, aquí, en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, se apartaban, ayer, de mí, cuando la ciudad de Buenos Aires fue mi cárcel. [...]
>
> Entonces, ellos, los dueños de Buenos Aires, y sus mujeres, con las que, a veces, se acostaban, y las mujeres de los otros – amigos, parientes, prestamistas, con los que se acostaban en más ocasiones de las que aconsejaría la prudencia – entraban en la catedral, vestidos con ropas diseñadas por un francés astuto y delicado, y se persignaban, y rezaban, y bajaban los ojos ante un hijo crucificado de Dios. (17)

Rosas' attitude towards the city is the opposite of Paz's impressions. Not only was Rosas celebrated by the "dueños de Buenos Aires" but he was never afraid of rubbing shoulders with the people as suggested in the fragment that describes him sipping *mate* and eating *empanadas* in a poor district of the city cited above. Consistent with his personality, that is quintessentially barbarian, the city from his perspective is grotesque, almost anatomical, with a strong emphasis on its

sexuality. Contrary to Paz, he genuinely embraces and enjoys the crudeness and vulgarity of Buenos Aires:

> [...] para que no lo olvidaran, siquiera en el tiempo lento y jadeante que tardaban en desmontar de la panza o de la boca o del culo de la favorecida otoñal o adolescente, perversa o deliberadamente ingenua, pero sagaces todas ellas, y expertas en el uso de la lengua. (23)

Finally, the last of the motifs enumerated above common to both "La República" and "La estancia" sections of the novel is the reference by Paz and Rosas to each other, a phenomenon that places them in opposite corners by definition. Yet, here too, their differences of personality and ideology are reflected in how they each approach their nemesis. Paz sees Rosas through the lens of his memories of fear of being tortured by the *mazorca*, Rosas's secret police, during his imprisonment. But he also admires the dictator, who is healthy and handsome, and unquestionably capable of pursuing his goals and making decisions with a sense of conviction. His references to Rosas are elaborate, meticulous, and explore different aspects of the dictator's activities and his relations to the inhabitants of Buenos Aires. Although his designation of the man as "el hombre rubio, alto, hermoso, sano", may be interpreted ironically, it also has some of the irrational magnetism that Paz seems to feel towards Rosas, comparable to the fascination one experiences when confronted with an animal in the wild.

Rosas lacks the complexity and ambiguity of Paz in the perception of his enemy. Although he also feared and admired Paz, to a certain extent, for his effectiveness in organizing troops, his military skills, and the ability to defeat his most feared and renowned caudillos, such as Quiroga, López, and Echagüe, his perception of the general remains pragmatic. When his daughter, Manuela, shares a vision of a ghostly Paz

walking in the woods with her father, Rosas does not enter into a nuanced intellectual analysis of his enemy but approaches him in a simpler, direct way and refuses to consider him a threat:

> – Escúcheme, Manuela: *el manco* es nadie. *El manco* no es unitario. *El manco* no es federal. No es rico, *el manco*. ¿Dónde lo han de enterrar, si no es dueño de una miserable lonja de tierra...? Y yo soy Dios: por eso está vivo *el manco*. (27)

Rivera represents Paz and Rosas's perspective on national and personal problems as perfect and irreconcilable opposites. However, their positions are dictated by an understanding of reality that paradoxically unites them. Paz perceives the nation and reality on spiritual and intellectual levels: he analyzes the situation, suffers ethical dilemmas, is self-conscious, idealizes love, maintains relationships based on the respect of the other person, and condemns the city for its ideological instability. Rosas, on the other hand, experiences life physically with an almost animal immediacy. He is self-assured, seems free of ethics or scruples, bases his existence on physical strength, has sexual urges, and enjoys the vulgarity and lack of sophistication of ordinary people. In other words, Paz and Rosas represent the duality of the human existenee, the spiritual and the corporeal, that co-exist in unity even if they are opposites.

As strong as the difference between Paz and Rosas may seem, it diminishes as the novel progresses, and points to an organic union not only at the personal but also national level. Rosas remarks in the third "La estancia" section, that all the protagonists of the country's formative period have what Sarmiento called in *Facundo* "sangres afines" which designates a similar origin:

> El señor Domingo Faustino Sarmiento escribió a propósito del fino general Facundo Quiroga que *nuestras sangres son afines*.

> El señor Sarmiento odia a España: ese odio lo impulsó a escribir palabras que suenan a lascivas y desoladas. Vertiginosas esas palabras. [...]
>
> Las sangres del señor Sarmiento, las del general Quiroga, las del general José María Paz, las del general Urquiza, y las mías son afines.
>
> Son las sangres de los que deben mandar. De los que mandan, no importan los desvelos y las traiciones de nuestras lenguas. (69; original emphasis)

The resemblance between Rosas, Paz and other generals, however, goes beyond the broad traits of character described in *Facundo* and is developed in the novel for different ends. It is suggested by Rosas on several occasions that Unitarians and Federalists do not differ from each other in terms of their political vision for the nation because they are all in search of progress, as Rosas implies when he considers Sarmiento, a Unitarian, to be a member of his own faction: "¿No quieren escucharme? Escuchen al señor Sarmiento: él habla por mí. Él es mi ángel de la guarda" (69). Paz, Rosas, Quiroga, López, and Sarmiento in Rivera's novel are all cast in the same mold, even if they are on different sides politically. The same kind of doubts about the differences between Paz and Rosas, Unitarians and Federalists, are expressed by Paz himself:

> Si Rosas no miente, y Paz no miente, ¿qué nos diferencia?
>
> Los dos somos católicos, los dos doblamos la rodilla ante el Hijo de Dios, los dos somos argentinos: ¿qué nos diferencia? (57)

> ¿Unitarios?
>
> ¿Federales?
>
> Siempre me pregunté a quiénes identificaban esas denominaciones, esos apelativos de clanes o de tribus, esos alaridos que brotan de las gargantas del paisanaje, hoy, y que se escucharon ayer, y que se escucharán mañana entre los tormentos de un degüello y otro.
>
> Rosas dijo que cuando lo llamaban federal se reía. Inteligente, Rosas. (61)

More important, perhaps, than the similarity of the political goals of Unitarians and Federalists is the affinity between Rosas and Paz on an existential level. Both lived in fear of each other and were afraid of death; both saw themselves as gods (Paz as god of

war and Rosas as an omnipotent god); and both eventually fell into despair. Finally, both came to a sorry end on this earth; although this is less evident in the case of Rosas in *Ese manco Paz* than in *El farmer*, where his self-assurance and the regal attitude is contrasted with the circumstances of his everyday life. Yet, regardless of Rosas' arrogance, the sections of *Ese manco Paz* concerned with him are written from the perspective of exile, where he has been deprived of his extraordinary god-like powers. He is no longer the administrator of the country and its endless lands, but just a farmer suffering from cold in provincial England. Although he acts and thinks in the same despotic way as he used to in his time of glory, his situation mirrors that endured by Paz. His letters to the Queen of England, with their meticulous analysis of the political situation and a series of advice to stop the spread of proletarian ideology, have no effect and are not even acknowledged because he is not a head of state any more. Just like Paz, he is old, redundant, useless, and alone, living in the past and patiently awaiting his death. *El farmer* even ends with Rosas' plea: "Patria, no te olvides de mí" (123).

Mortality becomes the common denominator for Paz and Rosas. Whatever they attempt and however brave, cruel, astute, and extraordinary they may be, they are both defined by the limitations of their corporeal existence and the fact that they are doomed to die. This basic characteristic of the human condition makes them equal and ultimately questions the sense of the ideological differences that separate them, a Unitarian and a Federalist who, as Massot notes in his essay about violence in Argentinean culture, were factions that were also indistinguishable in their barbarity:

> En las luchas de unitarios y federales, en cambio, fue perdiéndose gradualmente toda administración discriminada de la violencia. Los códigos de caballerosidad, los valores compartidos y las leyes de la guerra resultaron

> pisoteados de manera inmisericorde, en una lucha a muerte en la que nadie imaginó posible ni pedir ni dar cuartel. (77)

The vision of history defined by human biology and death demythologizes both Paz and Rosas, and also the discourses that they represent. Guibert Heitner calls this strategy, that challenges conventional historiography, a new historical decadentism:

> Rivera's use of sexuality in the treatment of history combines the pre-Proceso effort to impose nature onto culture with this new socio-political referent. In this manner he brings some of the more predictable aspects of both decadentism and neo-decadentism with the desire to perform textually upon the unsullied historical figures what was perpetrated extra-textually against many *desaparecidos* during the Dirty War. (282)

Rivera confronts the symbolic relevance of concepts such as beauty, truth, religion, perfection and authority in *Ese manco Paz*. Through an emphasis on biological metaphors, he sets a consciousness of human depravity and mortality against post-Enlightenment paradigms that seem superficial and artificial by comparison and ultimately useless in the face of death. In this context, Rivera rejects the narrative structures of conventional historiography and opts for a fragmented and often incoherent narration. Decadence, notoriously present in Rivera's novel, expresses the same vital issues and the same concern for situations of crisis that have found their way into other historical novels of the post-dictatorship. In light of the postmodern disenchantment with metanarratives and projects from the political left and right, Rivera emphasizes the common and deeply human characteristic that places primal nature above ideological disputes of past and present Argentina.

History in Rivera's version leads to reevaluations of the notion of *Patria*, with an upper case, defined by battles, violence, and politics. Paz's greatest regret, contemplated at the end of his life in the loneliness of his bed in a Buenos Aires, which does not need

him anymore, is the lost time with Margarita. He reaches the conclusion that his desperate attempts to respond to the question "¿Dónde está la patria?" made exclusively with the help of the sword were misplaced. The real battles were not fought by the soldiers on the field but by his wife at home who suffered uncertainties about the fate of her husband, who had to be alone while he was at war, who took care of their children, who washed the dishes everyday, who, in other words lived unmoved by the ideologies that pushed Argentina to destruction.

> Patria se llaman esas batallas, Paz.
> Con minúscula patria.
> Sin tambores.
> Sin banderas.
> Con rehenes, Paz. (81)

This eulogy for a simple family life lost to the absurdity of wars is at the center of the idea of *patria*, with a lower case, that Rivera defends in his vision of history in *Ese manco Paz*. Rivera re-writes history from a perspective that ultimately is worth more than the exuberant and luxurious language of traditional historiography because it provides a discourse that unites the nation despite the ideological conflicts. The notion of an inclusive nation that emanates from *La tierra del fuego* is, therefore, developed in *Ese manco Paz* which defines the nation as a community of people sharing a private life. As will be seen in the next chapter, Abel Posse also embraces the history of a fragmented and ideologically conflicted society that is none the less united by the idea it has of itself as a nation.

Chapter V

History in the Present:

La pasión según Eva by Abel Posse

> Cada quién construye el mito del cuerpo como quiere, lee el cuerpo de Evita con las declinaciones de su mirada. Ella puede ser todo. En la Argentina es todavía la Cenicienta de las telenovelas, la nostalgia de haber sido lo que nunca fuimos, la mujer del látigo, la madre celestial. Afuera es el poder, la fuerte joven, la hiena compasiva que desde los balcones del más allá declama: "No llores por mí, Argentina".
>
> (Tomás Eloy Martínez)

The preceding chapters have focused on two periods of Argentinean history that hold a significant place in the process of formulation of the nation. Both periods have been rewritten in recent historical novels according to principles of inclusion that appeal to a broader definition of the nation and a different way of historicizing the past. I began my discussion with *La tierra del fuego* a novel that refers to the situation of the Indigenous inhabitants of Argentina who were written out of the national project elaborated by a white, liberal elite that sought to impose a Europeanized vision of the country. In the next chapter, I turned to *Ese manco Paz* a novel about the conflict between the Unitarians and Federalists that marked Argentinean political life in the nineteenth century and was at the center of its guiding narratives.

As has been seen, the principle of inclusion present in those novels refers to phenomena often overlooked in histories and also engages narrative strategies different from the customary ones. The narrator of *La tierra del fuego*, Jack Guevara, writes

against accepted historical descriptions of the encounter between Europeans and Amerindians in a manner that seeks to include groups excluded from the national discourse. Similarly, *Ese manco Paz* manifests a shift from the direct description and analysis of political events, characteristic of conventional historiography. The novel embraces the private and intimate side of the lives of the principal actors in the nation's story thereby allowing for a critique of the artificial and self-perpetuating conflict that held the nation in thrall.

This chapter will focus on *La pasión según Eva* (1995) by Abel Posse, an author known for his historical novels on the period of the conquest of America. His *Daimón* (1981) tells the story of Lope de Aguirre's rampaging voyage along the Amazon (1560-61), *Los perros del paraíso* (1983) focuses on Christopher Columbus, and *El largo atardecer del caminante* (1992), concerns Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca (1490-1557) whose participation in a 1528 expedition to Florida ended in shipwreck and captivity. In each of those novels, Posse re-writes history by exploring the possibilities of narrating past events in ways that investigate the past beyond the standard historical texts through which they are known. *El largo atardecer del caminante*, for example, takes up the story of Cabeza de Vaca's shipwreck, his life among Amerindians, and his eventual wandering across the continent.

Cabeza de Vaca's adventures became well known through his *Relación* (1542), a report written for the king, Carlos V, after his return to Spain, which quickly became a classic of the conquest period and continues to be read today. In his novel about the events described in the *Relación*, Posse re-reads the text by Cabeza de Vaca and elaborates parts of his story glossed over in the original, especially the period of six years

in captivity that, for reasons such as the sheer impossibility of telling his experiences or his fear of the Inquisition, were not developed by the author in his testimony. As a result, the story in Posse's novel presents a version of contact with the Indigenous people of America that was not formulated in the original *Relación* and opens one particular encounter with the Europeans to different interpretations reversing traditional perceptions of Amerindians. In this respect, *El largo atardecer del caminante* shows some of the ethnic inclusivity evident in *La tierra del fuego*.

In *La pasión según Eva* the same principles of re-writing and inclusion manifested in Posse's earlier novels and in the historical novels we have already discussed are at play. As in *La tierra del fuego* and *Ese manco Paz*, *La pasión según Eva* is written against orthodox historiography. Instead of presenting the past through traditional narrative structures, such as a linear chronology and an omniscient narrator who imposes a hegemonic perspective, the novel tells a temporally and discursively fragmented story through a range of voices, each offering a different perspective on the life of Eva Perón (1919-1952). This particular narrative structure is a function of how Posse historicizes the period of time that concerns not only her early years but also her brief presence in the political limelight (1946-1952) and her premature death. It also serves to present Perón as a key symbol of the extension of political participation to the hitherto excluded masses. Moreover, the novel refers to events that belong to the recent history of the country, that is, to a period of time that traditionally is not considered historical because it still remains in living memory.

Like Posse's other novels, *La pasión según Eva* has also to be read in relation to other historical texts, namely, other narratives about Perón. In this case, however, writing

between the lines of previous accounts of her life is somehow complicated. The number and diversity of representations of Perón, both historical and artistic, considerably exceeded the number of images of figures that Posse had hitherto fictionalized. Eva Perón was not only a complex individual who had had an important impact on recent Argentinean history but she was also a national symbol duplicated, interpreted, and commented on countless times through different media. Interestingly, Posse does not show a preference towards any particular version of her life but, instead, incorporates many of them in a polyphonic narrative. *La pasión según Eva* is therefore analyzed in this chapter not as a biography of Eva Perón but rather as a historical novel that confronts ways of representing Evita at the end of the twentieth century. The narrative strategies used by Posse to this effect, although far from innovative at the time he wrote his novel, reflect a specific vision for the nation in the particular circumstances of the 1990s when the politics of economic exclusion were again in force and the ideals embodied by Eva Perón regained some of the topicality they had enjoyed during her life.

The Saint of Peronism

Eva Perón's symbolic importance in Argentinean history is related mainly to the irreversible inclusion in politics of the previously excluded popular masses and the enfranchisement of women that came about under Peronism. Indeed, Eva Perón was an extraordinary representative of these excluded sectors of Argentinean society not only because she voiced their concerns but because she came from them herself. She was a woman in a patriarchal society, born out of wedlock. She was never recognized by her biological father and suffered poverty after his death. Even when she moved to Buenos

Aires, in many ways a form of social elevation, her decision to become an actor, not the most respected profession in the elitist capital, maintained her sense of marginalization. Since she did not belong to the Argentinean upper classes, her rise to power shocked the establishment, but, at the same time, it secured the loyalty of the popular masses who where able to identify with her.

María Eva Duarte de Perón was the second wife of Juan Perón and, from 1946 until her death in 1952, the First Lady of Argentina. Although she never held an official appointment within Perón's government, over the course of the six years of his first presidency she was very active within the pro-Peronist trade unions and quickly became the most powerful woman in Argentina. She had a following among the masses mostly through her work in the charitable Eva Perón Foundation and she organized the nation's first large-scale female political organization (Partido Peronista Femenino). In 1951, Eva Perón expressed a desire to be allowed to run for the office of Vice-President of Argentina. Her bid received great support from the Peronist public, but her declining health and opposition from the military and the elite ultimately blocked her candidacy and, as if by way of compensation, she was granted the official title of Spiritual Leader of the Nation shortly before her death in 1952.

The relevance Eva Perón has had for Argentina is certainly disproportionate to her relatively brief appearance on the political scene. Together with her husband, she transformed Argentinean politics forever, an effect captured in the following confession by Beatriz Sarlo who was born in 1942: "Formo parte de una generación que fue marcada en lo político por el peronismo y en lo cultural por Borges" (2003 9). A leading intellectual, she has not chosen lightly the two outstanding phenomena of Argentinean

postwar politics and culture. If Borges was a giant of literature, the Peróns had a comparable impact on political life.

Although in the 1920s and 1930s the Argentinean working class had begun to gain political importance with the emergence of the Unión Cívica Radical and the presidencies of Hipólito Yrigoyen (1916-1922 and 1928-1930), Juan and Eva Perón's populist policies brought the masses into politics to a degree that had not been seen before. This is not to say that they necessarily practised a politics based on inclusion and tolerance, given the authoritarian streak in Peronism. However, it is undeniable that Juan and Eva Perón irrevocably included, in an otherwise elitist Argentinean politics, groups that had never before been considered in the distribution of power. More importantly, as Mariano Ben Plotkin remarks, they created a system of symbols, myths and rituals which constituted what can be characterized as a "Peronist political imaginary" (ix) that has effectively redefined the place of the working class in Argentinean politics. Eva was a central figure in this process:

> The impressive unity of the movement [Peronism] can be explained, in part, by its rapid expansion among formerly unpoliticized groups without preexisting party allegiances to conflict with their new Peronist loyalties. Under Perón, labor unions rapidly doubled in size with the addition of new members for whom the very meaning of political militancy was defined by fidelity to the Leader. Perón's wife Eva was instrumental in maintaining his relationship with the unions, and she brought other, previously unorganized groups into the Peronist fold. Eva Perón cultivated the support of women by advocating their right to vote and by creating a special wing of the party for them. She reached out to "the humble" by creating a Social Welfare Foundation to minister paternalistically to their needs. (Halperín Donghi, 2002 263)

Peronism, first and foremost, was a movement based on a strong emotional appeal driven by the inclusion of the masses in politics and a sense of social justice inscribed in the ideology of *justicialismo*. According to Sarlo, Peronism was much more than just an

ideology: "Antes que una ideología, antes que un sistema de ideas, el peronismo fue una identificación" (2003 92). Plotkin also notes that Peronism based its impressive symbolic effectiveness on the fact that large numbers of Argentineans from the popular sector were able to identify themselves with the movement on an emotional rather than ideological level.

Given the apparent elusiveness of Peronism itself, the common denominator for Peronists of different shades was Perón himself. The idea behind the man, however, was often interpreted in very different and sometimes conflicting ways. The ideological instability of the movement is perhaps more clearly identifiable in light of changes in policies and political sympathies with respect to Perón during his two presidencies, the early period of 1946-1955 and his later return from exile to political life in 1973-1974. The lack of ideological cohesion became evident in the splintering of Peronism after Perón went into exile and has been represented in several notable works of literature. For example, *No habrá más penas ni olvido* (1980) by Osvaldo Soriano, appropriately translated into English as *A Funny Dirty Little War* by Nick Caistor, presents the political conflicts of the time in Argentina as a battle between opposing groups each claiming to be Peronist but each understanding the notion quite differently. Similarly, in Tomás Eloy Martínez's *La novela de Perón* (1985) the Argentinean leader appears as an empty sign, representing contradictory ideas.

In the broader context of Peronism, Eva Perón cannot be regarded merely as the president's spouse hidden in the shadow of Perón. The nature of her part in the movement was not exclusively political. She was an icon who embodied many of the political and social ambitions of an unrepresented part of Argentina's population and her popularity

was as strong as her husband's, if not stronger. As Susana Rosano stresses, Eva Perón provided an important visual and personal presence for the propaganda broadcast by the regime. Her image was meticulously elaborated during Perón's first term both by herself and the regime's propagandists (189-90).

During both presidential terms of 1946-1952 and 1952-1955, the Ministry of Information (Secretaría de Informaciones) organized a massive publicity campaign. The Ministry focused on the circulation of portraits of Eva Perón on a daily basis in newspapers controlled by the regime, such as *Mundo Peronista*, *Democracia* and *La Causa Peronista*, and the publication of pictures of Juan and Eva became a mandatory feature in school textbooks at the primary and secondary levels. In addition to the distribution of this material, the Ministry issued occasional pamphlets about Eva and produced thousands of matchboxes, ashtrays, handkerchiefs, cigarette lighters, and calendars all adorned with reproductions of her face. Eva's presence was also noticeably ubiquitous on radio and in movie theatres. The presidential couple was the frequent protagonist of *Sucesos argentinos*, a newsreel presented before each screening of movies in theatres around the country. The Argentine public was therefore constantly bombarded with the image of Eva Perón looking at them from newspapers, hoardings, and movie screens and talking to them every day on the radio.

For many Argentineans, Eva Perón's features not only became familiar, like those of a member of the family, but equivalent to a positive side of the government that was at pains to take care of "the humble" and give a voice to women in a predominantly patriarchal culture. To large sectors of the working class and the marginalized, the Peróns brought a noticeable improvement in their lives and redefined their role in the society. If

some Argentineans until this day preserve Eva's picture on the walls of their home, it is because she literally embodied the idea of social justice.

Eva Perón has to be understood in light of myths produced by the state propaganda and the opposition and which manifest an anxiety that was focused on her body (Plotnik 18). Her admirers emphasized her unconditional conjugal love and her maternal instincts even if she had no children of her own. At the same time, however, she personified transgression in a world to which she was not supposed to belong and was for this very reason condemned by the elite and the middle class. The anti-Peronists attacked her presumed sexual immorality and her character, which was perceived to be domineering and aggressive. Moreover, her maternalism was negated by claims that she was cold and sterile, and her charitable work was discredited by emphasizing that it was motivated by a thirst for power. The obsession with Eva Perón's body is in many ways related, of course, to the constant reproduction of her features for the purposes of political propaganda. Her physical appearance and presence refer directly to Argentina as a nation and, as her health deteriorated, Peronists began to present her not as the mother of the nation but as a saint:

> el régimen peronista opone a los carteles que la oposición coloca en las calles con la leyenda "¡Viva el cáncer!" la construcción de una imagen hagiográfica que tiene su soporte en la semantización del cuerpo enfermo de Eva. El aparato de propaganda del régimen a través de la prensa y de los medios de comunicación comienza a representarla como una santa. Una vez muerta, incluso, aparece toda una iconografía religiosa del personaje en estampas, medallones, oraciones dedicadas a Evita y relatos en que se hace alusión al contacto que la muerta tuvo con Dios. (Rosano 200)

Eva became the saint of Peronism to whom the humble appealed for economic help. On numerous occasions their prayers were answered by the miracle of a sewing machine to start a business or an artificial limb provided by Eva's Foundation, all duly

recognized, of course, in Peronist propaganda. This power of intercession between the people and Perón was fully embraced by Eva herself. In *La razón de mi vida* (1952), Eva's quasi-hagiographic autobiography, published seven months before her death, she confesses:

> yo no era ni soy nadà más que una humilde mujer... un gorrión en una inmensa bandada de gorriones... Y él era y es el cóndor gigante que vuela alto y seguro entre las cumbres y cerca de Dios.
>
> Si no fuese por él que descendió hasta mí y me enseñó a volar de otra manera, yo no hubiese sabido nunca lo que es un cóndor ni pudiese contemplar jamás la maravillosa y magnífica inmensidad de mi pueblo.
>
> Por eso ni mi vida ni mi corazón me pertenecen y nada de todo lo que soy o tengo es mío. Todo lo que soy, todo lo que tengo, todo lo que pienso y todo lo que siento es de Perón.
>
> Pero yo no olvido ni me olvidaré nunca que fui gorrión ni de que sigo siéndolo. Si vuelo más alto es por él. Si ando entre las cumbres es por él. Si a veces toco casi el cielo con mis alas, es por él. Si veo claramente lo que es mi pueblo y lo quiero y siento su cariño acariciando mi nombre, es solamente por él. (9-10)

Clearly, in the metaphor of *La razón de mi vida*, Juan Perón is a mythical creature, the condor, in direct contact with God, and Eva is merely one of the sparrows whose exceptionality lies in the fact that she was chosen by this wonderful demi-god who introduced her into celestial spheres. To be with Perón is to be closer to the divine. In Eva's own words, her role is like that of one of the saints, a perfect human being devoted to God, who has access to the divine ("toco casi el cielo con mis alas") and is able to guide the rest of the sparrows (Argentineans) to celestial bliss.

La razón de mi vida was an important element in the creation of the image of Eva as the saint. As mentioned earlier, Peronist propaganda gave a visual foundation to Eva's sanctity so that reproductions of her created an iconography for the regime. This was possible, however, only because of Eva's appeal to the masses that identified with the movement. *La razón de mi vida* fortified this identification and established an emotional

and spiritual foundation for her sanctity. As a text directed at a popular audience, it combined automatic devices of everyday speech with the crowd-arousing bombast that typified the political addresses of both the Peróns (Foster 74). More than that, however, the autobiography created Eva Perón's narrative persona based on a sort of authenticity that unquestionably made her appear as one of the "people". Contrary to what might have been expected from such a work, in her narrative Eva Perón did not concentrate on the events that ended in the political triumph of her husband. She provided instead a portrait of the feelings, emotions, and sentiments that distinguished her from the Peronist movement. As David William Foster notes, from the narrative persona created in *La razón de mi vida*, Eva

> sees herself as essentially unique, possessing a sense of mission. Her unique task and the depth of her perception of the goals and values of that mission set Eva Perón, the historical figure, apart from the rest of her countrymen. Her story is, therefore, a privileged version of the events. This persona seeks to demonstrate how she embodies a range of "natural" – and presumably more authentic – feelings that refute the worn and corrupt prejudices of traditional culture in Argentina. And this persona promotes a level of intuitive knowledge that makes her narrative valuable as an interpretation that only she can provide. (68)

Indeed, in *La razón de mi vida* Eva Perón stresses the difference between the "natural" versus the "cultural" and builds her autobiography on it. She uses it as a strategy to emphasize the oppression practised by the traditional Argentinean culture of the elite whose idea of civilization is based on French and English cultures. Against it stands *Justicialismo*, the Peronist doctrine that stands for social justice, devalues the hierarchical distinctions of social categories and dignifies the good, pure, unpretentious individual. The less fortunate citizen, called by Eva the *descamisado*, is viewed in this

rhetoric as a "noble innocent whose sentiments are all the more profound because of their ingenuousness" (Foster 69).

La razón de mi vida repeats over and over how many endless late hours Eva Perón spent working for the "true" people of Argentina, the reproaches from Perón for her long absences from his side, and the toll her activities had on her health. Eva, in sum, appears in her autobiography not only as the martyr who sacrifices herself on behalf of the *descamisados*, but as a "pure" Argentinean whose actions are natural and come from a deep, spiritual goodness:

> Es que un trabajo realizado exige otro y no hay más remedio que seguir adelante. Yo, desde ahora me lamento ya de que la vida, por más larga que sea, sea tan corta, porque hay demasiado que hacer para tan poco tiempo. (203)

> Pero... no he escrito esto para la historia.
> Todo ha sido hecho para este presente extraordinario y maravilloso que me toca vivir: para mi pueblo y para todas las almas del mundo que sientan, de cerca o de lejos, que está por llegar un día nuevo para la humanidad: el día del Justicialismo.
> Yo solamente he querido anunciarlo con mis buenas o malas palabras... con las mismas palabras con que lo anuncio todos los días a los hombres y a las mujeres de mi propio pueblo.
> No me arrepiento por ninguna de las palabras que he escrito. ¡Tendrán que borrarse primero en el alma de mi pueblo que me las oyó tantas veces y que por eso me brindó su cariño inigualable!
> ¡Un cariño que vale más que mi vida! (317)

Reading *La razón de mi vida* from a contemporary perspective can either amuse or outrage on account of its naïveté formulated in the frame of Argentinean popular culture and its clear political bias. The Argentinean reader, disillusioned with the myth of the Peróns, cannot but see this text as self-serving, dishonest, "a superb example of political kitsch" (Foster 77). The vision of the nation that Eva Perón expresses in *La*

razón de mi vida is based on emotional criteria common to the masses but foreign to the political elite whom she excluded from her conception of Argentina.

By rewriting the story of Eva Perón and alluding in the title of his novel to the hagiographic image attributed to her in Peronist propaganda, Abel Posse draws on texts that presented Eva as a saint. At the same time, however, he embraces the ambiguity of her personality and the multiple images of her that make the "true" Eva elusive. By integrating other constructions of Eva in his novel he avoids political kitsch and clichés. He also uses the novel to project a new vision for the nation reflected in a particular organization of the text marked by temporal and discursive fragmentation.

A Portrait in Fragments

Like *Ese manco Paz*, *La pasión según Eva* is a highly fragmented narrative. It begins with three short paragraphs presenting Eva Perón alone in her quarters in the presidential palace at a moment when she realizes that her illness may be terminal:

> NO QUEDA NADIE. Acomodaron los muebles y luego el servicio subió para preparar el traslado de la ropa, de los cosméticos y de la vitrina de los remedios, que siniestramente desplazaron en cantidad a los aromáticos mejunjes de la belleza femenina.
>
> Detrás del cortinado rojo del pasillo Eva descubre esos objetos que ingresaron con el sigilo con el que el libertino desliza en la casa un par de prostitutas. Son dos tubos de oxígeno, golpeados y rayados del traqueteo, de ir de una muerte a otra. De ellos penden unas obscenas gomas rosadas. Los tubos de oxígeno parecen dos palurdos provincianos invitados a una fiesta médica de punta en blanco. Eva sabe que estos tubos suelen llegar apenas un poco antes que el cura. Los trataron de esconder detrás del cortinado del pasillo que da al baño.
>
> Eva se desliza hasta el baño, enciende todas las luces y se planta en medio, ante los espejos, que tienen esa implacable sinceridad de enfermera alemana. (11)

This first fragment of the novel is quoted in its entirety because it serves as a kind of prelude, as in a play or a movie script. Eva's private space forms a meticulously elaborated scenario that announces the final act of her life. The oxygen cylinders, the plastic tubes, and the unforgiving mirror that reflects her alarmingly wasted body constitute the props that leave no illusion that the narrator will tell the story of Eva's last journey.

The main thread in the novel is the chronological narration of Eva's heroic struggle with cancer alluded to directly in the title of the novel. Although the word "passion" can have different meanings, *La pasión según Eva* suggests a religious interpretation. It brings to mind the "passion narratives" in the canonical gospels of the physical, spiritual, and mental suffering of Christ between the night of the Last Supper and his death. Although religious interpretations seem excessive in respect to Eva Perón, the motif of one who suffers while tirelessly working for her causes are unarguably at the center of Posse's novel. Since her misery could also be interpreted as a sort of sacrifice offered for the salvation of the masses, that is, to incorporate them into political life and bring them into the nation, certain parallels with passion narratives come to the fore, especially when the spiritual dimension of Peronism and the sanctity of Eva mentioned in the previous section of this chapter are taken into account.

By emphasizing the last period of Eva's life the narrator presents her death as the apotheosis of her life. Indeed, the strength of Eva Perón as an icon that survived the fall of Peronism is due in part to the fact that she died at a relatively young age and that her passing was preceded by a period of suffering that was recorded and broadcast by visual media of the time. After all, the images of Eva permanently engraved in popular culture

are those that capture not only her energy and youth, but also her sunken eyes and emaciated body in the last months of her life. Eva, just like another Argentinean icon, Carlos Gardel, is still alive in popular memory because she never lost her appeal. The historical relevance of Eva's passing is comparable in that sense to the outpouring that accompanied the death of Princess Diana. Although the lives and deaths of the two women were quite different, both were controversial figures who became idols of the people thanks in part to their charitable work and identification with popular causes. More importantly, both gained a fuller significance through their untimely deaths.

La pasión según Eva is narrated from a perspective that reveals the historical protagonist in a moment of weakness when she faces her mortality. Her situation is comparable to that of many of the protagonists of new historical novels such as José María Paz and Juan Manuel de Rosas in Rivera's novels, Simón Bolívar in García Márquez's *El general en su laberinto*, Christopher Columbus in *El arpa y la sombra* by Alejo Carpentier, and Álvarez Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca in Posse's *El largo atardecer del caminante*. In the case of Eva Perón, her death is also the pivotal moment when she becomes Santa Evita, the icon, as suggested by the propaganda around her. This dimension of her passing is emphasized in the text by epigraphs introduced in the course of the novel at the beginning of eight fragments of varying length. They stress the inevitability of her death and the approaching moment of her transformation from Eva to Santa Evita. The first epigraph establishes a kind of countdown: "*¡Sólo nueve meses! Nueve meses y quince días. Nueve veces un mes. Sólo nueve veces esto que pasa volando, un mes*" (11; original emphasis). This time frame is sustained in the next two epigraphs, which announce eight months (48) and a few months (104) respectively, only for the

countdown to begin again, expressed in terms of days rather than months: 272 days left (229), 50 days (318), 41 days (331), "unos días" (335), and finally 24 hours (339). The total period of nine months brings to mind a period of gestation as if Eva were approaching re-birth, a significance not lost on any reader familiar with Argentinean history.

The objective of the novel, however, is not only to show Eva's last months and the manner of her death but also to explain the events in her life that led her to her final moments. Thus, the main narrative thread is repeatedly broken to refer to Eva's past through flashbacks about her life and through testimonies from other speakers who remember her after her death. Eva's flashbacks are introduced in the novel when her consciousness slips in moments when she is wracked with fever or under the influence of sedatives. Eva's recollections, therefore, are closely related to her pain and gradual decline which open the door to otherwise suppressed memories:

> A veces la fiebre no levanta llama. Es un rescoldo, un lecho de cenizas. Una se abandona. Se dormita y surgen visiones de entresueño. El cuerpo, el ser es llevado como hoja caída en la corriente mansa. Se va navegando el pasado. Y el ayer se produce de toda voluntad. Las imágenes llegan sin esfuerzo, a contra-olvido, con quien puede decir a contracorriente. (30)

The flashbacks take Eva and the narrator to her childhood, her artistic career, and her life with Juan Perón. This particular fragmentation of her biography corresponds to the narrative of her life adopted by Juan José Sebreli in his classic work *Eva Perón: ¿aventurera o militante?* (1966). Sebreli divided Eva's life into three distinct periods each marked by a particular transformation. The first metamorphosis converts her from a provincial girl, Eva Ibarguren, to Eva Duarte, a glamorous Buenos Aires radio actress. The second transformation changes her from actress to la Señora de Perón, spouse of the

President of the Republic, occupying a socially predetermined place that she initially embraces. Yet, in the course of Perón's presidency, she becomes more politically engaged, especially through her charity work, and this activity triggers her third transformation into Evita, *la compañera*, a person at the center of power with whom the masses can identify and who intercedes for them with Perón. At this point her ideology diverges from that of her husband as she takes on the role of a mother to the *descamisados* and finally becomes the most powerful woman in the country and a source of inspiration for millions of Argentines. The narrative thread connecting those periods and transformations of Eva's life is largely chronological, but the text does not adhere to it absolutely and the narration often moves forward in time, back, and forward again.

The temporal structure of the novel not only emphasizes the historical and aesthetic importance of Eva's death. By presenting her illness as a moment for reflection, *La pasión según Eva* captures her transformations and the different phases of her life. As a result, the portrait of her reveals her ambiguity, a condition further explored by different commentators on the events that formed her life. The testimonies of these commentators, however, are collected by the narrator long after Eva's death, that is, from yet another temporal perspective. Although the exact moment when they were given is not specified, the reader can guess the approximate time of the testimony in certain cases. For example, the memory of Evita shared by Serge Lifar, a famous Ukrainian ballet dancer who visited Argentina under the Peróns, and Argentinean writers Manuel Mujica Láinez and Oscar Monesterolo took place probably sometime in the 1970s. The narrator makes a reference to Giorgio De Chirico's (1888-1978) last exhibition which must have taken place around that time:

> ESTAMOS EN VENECIA, EN LA GALERÍA 1 del Campo Sant'Angelo, donde Giorgio De Chirico inaugura lo que sería su última muestra en vida. Es un tórrido día de agosto a la insólita hora de las tres de la tarde. Cruzamos el "campo" hacia el café de enfrente con Serge Lifar, Manuel Mujica Láinez y Oscar Montesolo. Mujica Láinez evoca aquella ya lejana noche en el Colón, 1951. [...] Tomábamos café con agua mineral y Lifar recordó a Evita. (292)

As a result of the temporal structure, the reader is exposed simultaneously to Eva's present (her illness), her past (the different transformations that led her to become Evita), and her future (when she became a historical figure). The temporal fragmentation, therefore, serves to present Eva's death not just in light of her past but also to point to an extraordinary complexity in her that escapes linear narrative.

The Many Faces of Eva

Eva Perón was given a multitude of faces during her lifetime which found their expression in narratives circulated by both the Peronist propaganda and the opposition. Although Posse announces in the introduction to the novel that his ambition is to reach beyond the "estereotipo vulgarizado", that is, beyond the stereotypes conditioned by the above mentioned political positions, he does not intend to unveil the "real" Eva understood as a one-dimensional historical figure. On the contrary, he emphasizes her complexity as a national phenomenon. He suggests that, in order to understand Eva Perón and satisfactorily write about her, it is necessary to take all her incarnations, all her personalities, and all the opinions about her into consideration which, if combined, will ultimately amount to a comprehensive portrait of Argentina's best known woman. In fact, Posse constructs Eva's character in such a way that she too embraces her own ambiguity.

As Eva makes the first entry to her diary, her own name becomes a subject of elaboration:

> "Eva Perón. Eva Duarte. Yo, Eva María Ibarguren, la Irreconocida. María Eva Duarte de Perón. Marie Eve d'Huart. La Chola. La Negrita. Cholita. Mi negrita. Eva, María Eva. Evita.
>
> La Puta. La Yegua. La Ramera. La Lujosa. La Enjoyada. La Descamisada esa. La Resentida. La Trepadora. La Santa. La Jefa Espiritual de la Nación. Evita Capitana. El Hada de los Descamisados."
>
> Hay que aceptar todos esos nombres y apellidos. Soy, podría ser, todas y ninguna. (A todos nos debe pasar lo mismo.) Pero en la etiqueta de la tapa puse *Evita*. (29; original emphasis)

Eva enumerates the various names attributed to her during her lifetime. They range from her official name, as the spouse of Juan Perón, to the name given to her by the Peronist propaganda. In between those two appear numerous other designations given her, many of them pejorative. In her list she even includes fantasy names by which she apparently wished to be addressed, like the impossible Marie Eve D'Huart, which not only would require her to be French but to be recognized by her father. Fantastic or real, however, none of the names included in the list satisfies Eva because none of them corresponds fully to her personality. She finally concludes "Soy, podría ser, todas y ninguna".

The only name for which Eva actually settles is Evita, which reflects her ambiguity and places her not only in her own time but also in the future. It refers to the same extent to Evita *la compañera*, the name she was called by the masses in the 1950s, as well as to Evita the character interpreted by Madonna in the 1996 movie adaptation of a well known musical based on her life. The name Evita is the one chosen by the fictional Eva not only because it reflects her emotional attachment to it but also because it corresponds to the vision of Eva that Posse elaborates in the entire novel. It does not stop

at a historically conditioned portrait but aims to display the dimension of Eva that is equally rooted in the present. For this reason, the novel adopts a structure that is characterized by temporal fragmentation.

As suggested by the epigraph to this chapter, the images of Eva constructed in the 1950s multiplied after Eva's death and have been interpreted in many ways during the last fifty years or so, to the extent that every Argentinean seems to see her in a slightly different light. It cannot be forgotten that, in addition to being an historical figure and a national icon, Eva Perón has also become a literary and film character. The number of works of fiction, poetry, and drama referring to her is extensive, to say the least, and her cinematographic incarnations, although not so numerous, are impressive as well.

In her monograph about the literary persona of Eva Perón titled *Cuerpo femenino, duelo y nación*, Viviana Plotnik analyzed twenty-one literary works that included Eva Perón as a character and categorized them in seven groups based on thematic criteria. Her first group is focused on Evita's lying in state and the tributes paid to her by the Argentinean public. It consists of four short stories, "Ella" (1993)[25], by Juan Carlos Onetti, "La creación" (1959) by Silvina Ocampo, "El simulacro" (1960) by Jorge Luis Borges, and "La señora muerta" (1963) by David Viñas, as well as two poems by Néstor Perlongher, "El cadáver" and "El cadáver de la nación" (1980). Plotnik's second group contains Rodolfo Walsh's short story "Esa mujer" (1965) and the novel *Santa Evita* (1995) by Tomás Eloy Martínez, both formulated as a detectivesque investigation into the location of Eva's body, which is represented in both pieces as an object of desire and a

[25] Although published only recently, *Ella* was written in 1953.

symbol of the nation. The short stories "Evita vive" (1987) by Nestor Perlongher[26], "El único priviliegiado" (1991) by Rodrigo Fresán, and "La noche de Santa Ana" (1992) by Fernando López, together with the novel *El cadáver imposible* (1992) by José Pablo Feinmann, form the third group, which explores the figure of Eva Perón as a way of gaining a perspective on the dictatorship of the 1970s and the years of *menemismo*[27]. The next group contains two short stories, "Casandra" (1956) by Rodolfo Wilcock and "El privilegiado" (1963) by David Viñas, and the play *Eva Perón* (1964) by Copi. All three texts combine the idea of arbitrariness and excess as characteristics of women who exercise power. In the fifth group are the poem "Eva Perón en la hoguera" (1972) by Leónidas Lamborghini and two novels *La generala debe morir* (1995) by César Dani and *La pasión según Eva* by Abel Posse that focus on Eva Perón's journey to power and present it as a variant of the Cinderella story. The novel *Roberto y Eva* (1989) by Roberto Saccomanno and the play *Eva y Victoria* (1990) by Mónica Ottino, which constitute Plotnik's sixth group, explore the idea of imaginary encounters between Eva Perón and Roberto Arlt in one of them and between Eva and Victoria Ocampo in the other as a way to re-evaluate the relationship between literature and politics, high and popular culture, and Modernity and Postmodernity[28]. Finally in the last group are *La boca de la ballena* (1974) by Héctor Lastra, *Secretos de familia* (1995) by Graciela Beatriz Cabal and *A las 20:25 la Señora entró en la inmortalidad* (1981) by Mario Szichman. In this last group of

[26] This short story was written in 1975.

[27] The presidency of Carlos Menem (1989-1999) was characterized by the introduction of the neoliberal policies that led to the last economic crisis.

[28] The impossible combinations of Eva with other historical figures in fiction affirm her cultural existence as a symbol rather than a person. Examples of such combinations are not limited to Argentina. In the musical *Evita* (1976) by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, Eva Perón appears also in an imaginary encounter with Ernesto Che Guevara.

novels, Eva is not the protagonist but, as Plotnik puts it (25), a background figure and a social sign that illuminates the present and foretells the future.

As for her impact on the cinema screen, this began with her own appearances. She figured in the leading role in Mario Soffici's *La pródiga* (1945) and on a regular basis as herself in many episodes of the newsreel chronicles *Sucesos argentinos* of the Peronist era. Since her death, she has been the subject of several documentaries, including *Eva Perón inmortal* (1952), *El misterio Eva Perón* (1987), *Evita: The Story of Eva Perón* (1997), and *Evita: The Miracle of Eva Perón* (2002). And, she has also been the subject of feature films: Marvin J. Chomsky's *Evita Perón* (1981), Juan Carlos Desanzo's *Eva Perón* (1996), and most celebrated of all, Alan Parker's adaptation of the Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Evita* (1996) featuring Madonna, as Evita, and Antonio Banderas, as Che Guevara.

The literary and film representations of the figure of Eva Perón have been quite substantial and have had an understandable influence on her perception in popular culture. One example of her effect on the popular imaginary is the attribution to Eva of the phrase "Volveré y seré millones". Juan Sasturain of the Buenos Aires periodical *Página 12*[29], explains that, although many assign it to Eva, the celebrated phrase comes not from Eva Perón herself but from a poem written by José María Castiñeira de Dios on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of her death in 1962:

> Yo he de volver como el día
> para que el amor no muera,
> con Perón en mi bandera
> con mi Pueblo en mi alegría.
> ¿Qué pasó en la tierra mía,
> desgarrada de aflicciones?

[29] http:// www.pagina12.com.ar/imprimir/diario/contratapa/index-2005-12-01.html

¿Por qué están las ilusiones
quebradas, de mis hermanos?
Cuando se junten sus manos,
volveré y seré millones. [...]
Aunque la muerte me tiene
presa entre sus cerrazones,
yo volveré de la muerte.
Volveré y seré millones." (my emphasis).

Castiñeira de Dios, in turn, formulated his successful verse under the influence of a popular Hollywood movie *Spartacus: Rebel against Rome* (1960) featuring Kirk Douglas. In the last scene of the movie, dying on a cross, Spartacus says in the Spanish translation: "Volveré y seré millones". Castiñeira de Dios likely saw this movie in Spanish, borrowed the phrase and included it in his poem about the female Spartacus of the *descamisados*, a comment that found the expected acclaim of the public and entered the sea of myths about her. Although the analogies between Eva and Spartacus can be understood in terms of the popular fascination with heroes who are sacrificed for their people, as in the myth of Prometheus, it is important to emphasize that Eva Perón is not to be limited to perceptions of her historical existence. She is an icon entangled in a web of popular signs. Were she ever to return million-fold, it might well be through the millions of interpretations and transformations of her image found in contemporary Argentinean culture. Writing about Eva therefore not only requires historical investigation but also the incorporation of images that were constructed after her death, like the celebrated phrase "Volveré y seré millones" that is introduced in the novel by Eva's confessor and repeated by Eva herself:

Ella me dijo:
– No busque palabras, padre, estoy en un pozo muy hondo y de este pozo ya no me sacan ni los médicos, ni nadie, sólo Dios... Me voy, padre.
Entonces me salió del alma y le dije:
– Volverá y será millones.

– Volveré y seré millones… (341)

Strategies for Many Faces

The multi-dimensional portrait of Eva Perón in *La pasión según Eva* is achieved in part through the temporal structure discussed earlier and the discursive fragmentation that results from it. The novel consists of a total of 135 short fragments typographically separated from each other in one of two possible ways. The first of these consists of a short space between fragments and is used to indicate continuity with respect to voice but a shift with respect to time, as in the following example where the speaker in both fragments is Eva Perón:

> Y si no, al menos que Dios quiera darme cien días, padre, cien días.
>
> Por fin los tobillos finos. Como de gacela, por fin. Pensar que luché para no engordar con aquellas horribles ensaladas de zanahoria y sopa de acelgas. (13)

The second kind of separation consists of a wider space between fragments and the use of capital letters at the beginning of the new fragment. The wider space and the capitals in this case signal a change in narrative voice, as in the following sequence, where the first fragment belongs to Eva and the second to the primary third person narrator:

> Seis mil pesos. Comprarme el petit-gris y la estola y poder invitar a Pierina a comer las papas infladas de Las Delicias, al lado de Radio El Mundo, que es el lugar que a ella le gustaba. Y reírnos como locas, de los hombres. Fue ella la que me dijo que Napoleón era medio impotente…
>
> ANTES DE LA HORA CONVENIDA se desliza el bueno de Renzi. Ella observa como pone sobre la mesa del corredor *La Prensa* y *Democracia* doblados. Como es miércoles, dentro de ellos viene disimulado *El Tony*. […] Renzi espía hacia el interior del dormitorio. La cree dormida. Pero Eva está en el sillón de la antesala, en la penumbra, en el sofá con las piernas recogidas. (17)

Although the overall flow of the novel is regularly broken as the reader progresses through the text, each fragment has a coherent narrative so that the story is easily constructed. This kind of discursive fragmentation brings to mind aspects of the structure discussed in the previous chapter in relation to *Ese manco Paz*. In *La pasión según Eva* the strategy also serves to question traditional ways of writing history according to a linear chronology, but serves at the same time to create space for the introduction of different narrative voices in order to embrace various dimensions of Eva Perón and her multiple faces.

The two most important narrative voices in the novel are the primary narrator and Eva. The narrator is omniscient and possesses a thorough knowledge of the most intimate events of Eva Perón's life including her thoughts, moods, and even feelings of other characters in the novel towards her. This close connection with the protagonist is most apparent in the text at moments when the voice of the narrator and that of Eva alternate effortlessly:

> Al recordarla, Eva siente en las piernas la desolación de aquella chica. Le parece verla allí, en la esquina de Austria, doblando hacia Callao con su paso sin tiempo.
>
> Eva se dice: ¡Qué fuerte eras Eva, qué inconscientemente fuerte! Ni siquiera te enojabas.
>
> Se siente unida desde la enfermedad con aquel cansancio de la humillación. ¿Cuándo era? ¡Hace dieciséis años! ¡Tanto tan poco!
>
> Veamos, debía ser la segunda o la tercera semana de mi llegada de Junín. Después de aquella trifulca, al mediodía, con el encargado de esa horrorosa pensión de putas y rufianes de la calle Sarmiento, casi llegando a Callao. (50)

In this passage, the narration begins in the third person and reveals Eva's state of mind as she reminisces about her arrival in Buenos Aires as a teenage girl. Then, in the second paragraph, the narrator indicates that Eva reflects on that moment and quotes her internal

discourse. In the subsequent paragraph, however, no distinction is made between the voice of the narrator and that of the character, whose thoughts are introduced in free indirect style without any indication from the narrator to show where Eva's thoughts begin. The reader must deduce it from whatever indicators there are in the text, such as the person of the verb or the possessive adjective that points to the identity of the speaker. This closeness between the narrator and Eva is maintained throughout the novel. It makes the reader constantly privy to details of her life and allows the narrator to enter Eva's past through her point of view:

> "¿CÓMO ES POSIBLE RECORDAR tan lejos lo que está tan cerca, tan hace poco…? ¿Cómo es posible ver momentos cercanos, tan a lo lejos, tan absolutamente en el pasado? Mala señal de enfermedad. Mal signo." Piensa Eva en la tibieza acogedora del lecho.
>
> Largo atardecer de octubre. Noche de Buenos Aires. Un aire espeso. El aliento caliente de la ciudad presagiando tormenta. Imperceptible jadeo de esa selva de cemento. Empieza una larga noche de 1943. (173)

Although ubiquitous and omniscient, the narrator does not explicitly express opinions about Eva Perón. Eva's monologues, thoughts, conversations, and episodes from her private life are exhibited with an air of authenticity by an impartial voice who registers events without commenting on them. The role of the primary narrator consists therefore in controlling Eva's and other's voices and organizing them in a particular order. In this way, different opinions about her may be deduced by the reader from conversations she holds with other characters and, more importantly, from the numerous testimonies about her life given by people who witnessed the events to which the novel refers and who offer points of view different from those represented by Eva and the narrator. It is noteworthy that the testimonies are presented to the reader with the same apparent impartiality as Eva's thoughts. They all appear to be conversations with the

narrator and are often identified in the text by declaratory verbs or phrases such as "Mire" (22); "como le dije" (94); "Yo le diría que fue por entonces" (96); "Me gustaría contarle una anécdota" (143); "Usted sabe que conozco todas las versiones" (161); "Le puedo asegurar que" (179); "Le agradezco que se haya tomado el trabajo de venir a verme" (298); or "que yo recuerde" (328). Similar markers such as: "Le cuento:" (26), "padre" (41), "pero vea [...] ¿se acuerda?" (122), "Ya que me lo preguntas"(239) are also found in fragments consisting of Eva Perón's monologues or conversations, although it is not always clear to whom they are directed. The role of those markers is to point to the faithfulness of Posse's novel to reality and suggests that his work as a novelist required not only an investigation of the historical sources but also a journalistic work that consisted mainly in recuperating the oral history of events.

The majority of narrative voices remain anonymous. They can be divided into groups depending on the level of intimacy with the protagonist. The first group is composed by predominant figures in Eva's life, such as Atilio Renzi (41-44, 229-31, 318-21), Eva's personal secretary, who witnessed events that could not have been recorded by the media or seen by other people who were not as close as he was to Eva. Another figure that can be certainly included in this group would be her confessor Father Benítez (295-97, 313-14) who had access to secrets never to be revealed publicly. In the second group are Eva's collaborators and employees such as José María de Areilza (250-54), Spanish ambassador to Perón's regime, as well as Sara Gatti (342-43), Eva's manicurist. Due to their professional obligations, they had a formal but direct contact with Eva which allowed them glimpses at her life inaccessible to other mortals. The largest group of witnesses in the novel consists of Eva's friends from the period of her artistic career.

Chas de Cruz (135-36), Markos Zucker (136-39), and Elena Lucena (169-72), along with many other unidentified friends, reveal an image of a young, ambitious, and playful Eva. She was somehow extraordinary and destined for a political career, but enjoyed the obscure underworld of *milongas* as much as the glamorous life of Buenos Aires. The last group of speakers consists of people who are rather like voyeurs, people whose knowledge of Eva Perón was limited to a more casual observation of the subject. In this group belong members of Eva's extended family, such as her second cousin Juárez (65-68) who provides some insight into the years when Eva and her family struggled economically; Eva's neighbors from Junín (52-57); military officers who hated her (221-29) and overthrew Perón three years after her death; a journalist (160-66) who experienced censorship under Peronism; and the historian Felix Luna (216-17) who produces a letter proving the affection between Perón and Eva. It is noteworthy that although Posse acknowledges his many contributors at the end of the novel, most testimonies are conveyed anonymously in the text and the reader can only surmise at their source.

The apparent anonymity of voices incorporated in the novel to express opinions about Eva Perón that range from religious idealization to ferocious critique is at the core of Posse's concept of his *biografía coral*, which he explains in a note/introduction at the front of the novel, signed with his own initials A.P.:

> Sumario existencial de la personalidad del caudillo más fascinante de la Argentina de este siglo. *Biografía coral. Novela de todos.* Biografía de grupo, con personaje central (de capelina, sonriente) con fondo de coro y pueblo. El novelista ha sido más bien un coordinador de las versiones y peripecias que fueron delineando el mito. (9; my emphasis)

The reference to the idea of a *biografía coral* may be interpreted as an allusion to both the musical term "choir" and to the theatrical concept of "chorus" in ancient Greek tragedy. In music, *coro* refers to a body of singers led by a conductor who perform together, a concept that Posse adopts by delegating the narration to many voices coordinated by the main narrator. However, the allusion to the Greek tragedy is as important as the multi-vocal character of the novel. The chorus had an important role in Greek tragedy that, according to Peter Wilson, helped the audience to follow the performance and represented the general populace of any particular city who commented on the main themes of the play, showed how the ideal audience might react, and expressed secrets and fears that the main character could not say directly to the audience or to other characters. The concept of the chorus is integrated in the narrative structure in the sense that the narrative voices assume a role similar to that of the ancient chorus in Greek tragedy. As in a chorus, the different narrative voices in the novel combine to represent a general populace, from the people of her past in Junín to her more recent political collaborators, and provide background information about Eva which puts her political activities into perspective. Different narrators comment on Eva and on historical events in which she participated. Often they are aware of her emotional state, and discuss her secrets and fears. For example, several voices in the novel, including Father Benitez, refer to "Eva's secret":

> EL SECRETO DE EVA ES UN TEMA INABORDABLE. [...] Déjeme de arriesgar conjeturas. Le adelanto que pienso que el secreto existe y que las personas que conocen sus detalles están aún vivas, pero creo que hay que ser extremadamente prudente y no llegar a errores o suposiciones fáciles. (179-81)

> ¿Cuál es el secreto de Eva? ¿Era de tal magnitud como para llevarla a una especie de reclusión monástica en su Fundación, transformándose en una misionaria que pagase una suprema expiación? (266)

This specific resemblance to the ancient chorus allows Posse to claim that *La pasión según Eva* is intended as a "novela de todos", which can be taken to refer to a novel that belongs to all Argentineans as well as to a novel that gives a voice to the entire nation that, in this particular case, recognizes its common heritage embodied in Eva Perón. *La pasión según Eva* aims to represent national history in a way that escapes the dominant discourse by creating space for individual voices. It embraces the utopian idea of a national past embodied in the story of Eva Perón told by a chorus of voices constituting a community that represents Argentina, however divided and irreconcilable it may be.

This way of narrating history has been undoubtedly affected by new technologies. The inclusion of many voices gives the novel a narrative structure that brings to mind the construction of a contemporary documentary film and techniques conventionally used to provoke an illusion of objectivity and impartiality. The narrative flow in a documentary film is fragmented by the editor's cuts in order to incorporate historical footage, testimonies of witnesses, analyses given by specialists, and a narration that serves to hold the story together, to explain and to interpret its elements, and exercise an apparent control over the audio-visual resources displayed. The parallel with *La pasión según Eva* is striking: the function of the narrator of the novel is comparable to that of a movie camera, registering events without commenting on them; opinions about Eva are derived by the reader from the testimonies of witnesses to her life; and the intimate relationship of the narrator with the protagonist allows for the inclusion of aspects of Eva's life that are equivalent to the archival footage in a film documentary. Yet, the influence of new

media on the representation of Eva Perón's biography is not just a matter of technical similarity.

The form in which her biography is told also projects an attitude towards the past that arises from new conceptualizations of history and has a crucial meaning in respect to Eva Perón, her life, and its significance for the Argentina of the 1990s. Historical research into periods of time before the twentieth century is based on the analysis of writings (chronicles, letters, and reports), graphics (paintings and murals), and other artifacts of material culture. However, from approximately the beginning of the last century, the number of items produced by people in order to preserve memory has increased dramatically with the introduction of photography, moving pictures, and sound recordings. Suddenly, the "historization" of the past became easier as the new media made it possible to document it more quickly and access it more readily. The new media technologies have changed what constitutes the nature of history in the sense that we have become conditioned to perceive the recent past as significant as the past of centuries ago[30]. More importantly our ways of constructing the past have evolved. Just as technology has accelerated the processes of recording and reconstructing events, it has also made their interpretation more democratic. Virtually anybody can have an opinion that can be recorded and integrated into historical discourse. Television broadcasts and film documentaries, for example, are often composed of interviews with people who

[30] The recent digitalization of media technologies has only speeded up the processes through which the past becomes history. As the events of September 11, 2001 were broadcast on live television, it was not surprising to hear, a couple of hours after the attack on the WTC, a CNN correspondent ask a US ex-Secretary of State to provide a "historical context" for what had just happened. As the moment when the plane crashed into the second tower was replayed over and over again, viewers could simultaneously hear the historical analysis of events that had taken place moments earlier! The terrorist attacks of 2001, that took place only six years ago, are already considered for their historical dimension in terms of "the world before and after 9/11".

witnessed the events reported, investigated or reconstructed. Regardless of their level of literacy, they are able to produce testimonies in a register that corresponds to the conventions of the medium.

La pasión según Eva is written with this new perspective on history in mind. It refers to a recent past which traditionally would not be considered material for historical fiction. The novel is not therefore a historical novel in the traditional sense of the term we have discussed earlier. Moreover, *La pasión según Eva* is less a unilateral reconstruction than a view of the past elaborated from different and independent perspectives. The concept of *biografía coral* reflects, after all, a democratic vision of Eva's life where everybody is entitled to express a point of view. She appears in the novel in her different incarnations as the memory of her has been constructed by different individuals and political groups.

Tabloid Nation

Both the integration of Eva in history and the emphasis on the multiplicity of images and meanings she evokes in *La pasión según Eva* reflect a project for the nation. In fact, by writing a historical novel about Eva Perón, Posse makes a political statement. As described above, Eva Perón has been the subject of many literary works. Plotnik (173-74) goes so far as to see a national literary obsession with her and points to the symbolic relationship created in literature between her body and the Argentinean nation. The identification of the female body with the nation is not foreign to Argentinean literary tradition or to Latin America, for that matter. Doris Sommer has pointed out, as we have seen, the relation between romance and politics in the foundational narratives of Latin

America. Such a connection, as we have also noted, is found in the historical novel exemplified by *La novia del hereje* by Vicente Fidel López. The object of desire of such novels was a new nation that in López's work would be the offspring of a *criollo* woman and an Englishman, a vision that followed the same lines as the political project of the Unitarians. In the twentieth century, as Plotnik explains, the connection between desire and the nation in Argentina is represented by the body of Eva Perón:

> Si la novela del siglo diecinueve sostenía un proyecto político a través de la relación amorosa de los protagonistas, cuya unión prefiguraba el éxito y el optimismo de una unión nacional, la literatura argentina de este siglo relata el fracaso y la muerte de tales sueños y proyectos. Donde la relación amorosa casta, burguesa y platónica, se convierte en perversa sádica, incestuosa o necrofílica.
>
> En el siglo diecinueve la novela fundacional creaba un territorio feminizado, ahistórico y virginal, que era una página en blanco para ser inscrita por el hombre (Sommer 56-57). Por el contrario, en el siglo veinte la nación feminizada está "marcada", violada, agonizante, muerta. [...] De esta manera, el cuerpo embalsamado de Eva y sus reencarnaciones literarias son las ruinas alegóricas y melancólicas de proyectos nacionales fracasados. (173-74)

As Plotnik concludes, Eva Perón's repeated return through her literary incarnations is a manifestation of a longing for a project of a nation represented by her experience and body. She comes back to life in literature so often because her death symbolizes the end of certain national utopian ideals still yearned for in Argentina. *La pasión según Eva* is told by a variety of narrative voices representing different social classes and political affiliations because the dream-nation cannot be expressed any longer in a linear narrative. The form proposed by Posse escapes exclusionary tendencies that have always haunted Argentinean national projects. At the same time, however, he does not renounce the idea that it is still possible to formulate a narrative to unite all Argentineans.

Eva Perón re-appeared in the popular imaginary in the 1990s not only as the protagonist of novels and movies but also in other cultural manifestations such as posters and postcards. Even subversive forms of art, like graffiti, referring to her through inscriptions such as "Evita vive", covered the walls of Buenos Aires. The 1990s were a difficult period in the recent history of Argentina characterized, among other things, by *menemismo* and the implementation of neoliberal policies that improved Argentina's situation on international markets in the short term, but also polarized society dramatically, as Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo have described:

> Although during his electoral campaign Menem had resorted to old populist slogans and embraced Perón's political ideals, his version of Peronism would follow a very different path. Against all expectations, once in power Menem surprised everyone by implementing economic and social policies that favored fiscal austerity, economic liberalization, and massive privatization. The effects of Menem's neoliberal program on the national economy were striking. The rate of inflation dropped sharply, the budget was balanced, and defense spending was cut in half. The restoration of the country's financial credibility abroad facilitated the renegotiation of the foreign debt and new international loans. Economic stability was not without high social costs. Real wages fell drastically, and unemployment more than doubled. The adjustments hit particularly badly the interior, where the termination of trade protections and federal subsidies would push unemployment up to 35 percent in some areas. (474)

The socio-political transformations related to the implementation of neoliberal policies not only awakened the longings that Eva evoked but also resembled, in many ways, the circumstances when Peronsim emerged. As a result of Menem's policies, a great number of Argentineans found themselves on the threshold of poverty and were gradually sidelined from political and social life. In a relatively short period of time, Argentina became divided between "haves" and "have nots", which led to protests and barricades, especially in the interior provinces. Facing an escalating social discontent, expressed mainly by those who fell victim of Menem's privatization policies, the

government tried to criminalize the picketers, adopting the rhetoric of the dictatorship and accusing them of political subversion. Rodolfo Rabanal remarked in an article published in *La nación*, one of the leading newspapers in the country:

> Without the government being able to do anything to stop it, social discontent has deepened, spreading like a shadow across Menem's hopes for this October's elections. The unjust death of Teresa Rodríguez on a picket line in Patagonia, the dangerous situation in Cutral-Có, and the constant clashes between police and demonstrators are the living embodiment of a painful statistical fact: everyday more and more people are being socially and economically excluded from Argentine society, without anyone having even the vaguest idea how to stop it. [...] When the roadblocks began, the government thought it opportune to blame them on the return of the political subversion. (qtd. in Nouzeilles and Montaldo 500-01)

The gradual marginalization of an important sector of Argentinean society was happening simultaneously with the endorsement of legislation granting clemency to members of the armed forces and absolving them of responsibility for crimes committed during the dictatorship. In other words, Menem's government sought to disregard the most recent past of Argentina by imposing a politics of oblivion and historical amnesia in order to erase the memory of the years of lawlessness and brutality of the dictatorship as a way of maintaining a political consensus. It is important to remember that the Process of National Reorganization has to be read also as an attempt to engineer a political, social, and economic return to an idealized Argentina from before the 1930s, that is, an Argentina defined and legitimized by the history of the nineteenth century. This history did not include Indigenous people or Argentineans of African origin, as discussed in chapter 3, and it also ignored the massive migration to Argentina of new non-Spanish-speaking ethnic groups. More importantly in the context of this chapter, the Process of National Reorganization overlooked the political awakening of the urban masses that had come about with the modernization of the country. In other words, the dictatorship

disregarded Peronism as a movement. In the 1990s, absolving those responsible for the crimes committed under the dictatorship therefore meant a further approval to exclude an important part of Argentinean history. The fact that Posse chose to tell the story of Eva Perón may be interpreted as an effort to include the recent past into national history in spite of official politics.

In this sense *La pasión según Eva* becomes an historical novel because it is a statement about national history and it demands the inclusion of the more recent past in the national heritage. Turning his attention to Eva Perón as a historical subject, Posse writes against the politics of oblivion that characterized the 1990s and against the return to a specific vision of history rooted in the nineteenth century. His formulation of history depends, therefore, on the subject he is describing and embraces a certain type of national sensibility that characterizes popular culture.

While different perspectives on Eva Perón's life unfold in the course of the novel, the main idea that unites them is the notion of passion; hence its title. Religious interpretations aside, the word passion can be understood as an intense, driving, and overpowering feeling, such as intense anger. It can also signify an ardent affection, such as love; a devotion to some activity, concept or object, and sexual desire. In *La pasión según Eva*, all those aspects of the word "passion" are explored in the context of Eva's life. She is portrayed as a sensitive figure driven by extreme emotions. The reader learns about her furious outbursts, her compassion and unconditional devotion to charity, her weakness for clothing and tango, her love for Perón, and deep hatred of the opposition. As the stories about Eva are disclosed by different voices, it becomes evident that her presence in public life was an emotional experience for Argentineans as well. Eva Perón

was not perceived as an ordinary politician but rather as a figure to be understood through feelings rather than reason. Such sentiments towards her surface in the ways she has been represented in the novel. Stories about her are personal and have a slightly sensationalist flair characteristic of a tabloid.

Four main events stand out as the novel progresses through the description of the last months of Eva's life: her public renunciation of the vice-presidency of Argentina on August 22, 1951 (35-44); the failed military coup led by General Menéndez against the Peronist regime on September 28, 1951 (108-16); Juan Perón's second inauguration on June 4, 1952 (318-33); and, finally, Eva's death on June 26 of the same year (333-34). The transcendence of those events is highlighted by the surrounding fragments that refer to episodes of Eva's life outside her final months and explore her life starting with her difficult childhood and ending with the political career at her husband's side.

The events of August 22, 1951, illustrate Eva's emotional reaction to her marginalization as a woman from a lower social class. Eva's forced renunciation of her candidacy for vice-president is narrated in the novel from three different perspectives. First, from the point of view of Eva's manicurist who, after describing Eva as a saint for her charity work and her role in politics, stresses the deteriorating health of the first lady and her remarkable courage in confronting her illness. Since Eva believed that she would eventually overcome her cancer and continue in politics, the withdrawal of her candidacy for any possible official title in Perón's government is exposed as a personal failure:

> Sí, se lo afirmo: Eva, que había sido marginada desde su nacimiento, pensó que era justo tener un cargo legal, elegido por la mayoría electoral. Pensó que eso pondría punto final a su eterna descalificación. Para ella ese cargo sería como extenderse una partida de nacimiento perfectamente legítima y con todos los sellos en orden. Sería su instrumento para su pasión de justicia social, de caridad entregada. Esa pasión que la había llevado a imponerse

como horario desde las nueve de la mañana hasta las dos de la madrugada. (38)

The full meaning of her forced defeat may be grasped by the reader in the context of Eva's childhood memories that are juxtaposed to the narrative fragments related to August 22. The first two recollections elaborated in the novel refer to Los Toldos, where Eva was born, and Junín, where she grew up after her father's death. In both cases the narrative is melodramatic. She always lived with the burden of being born out of wedlock which shamed her and was the source of humiliation on numerous occasions. In particular, Eva remembers her father's funeral, which her mother, siblings, and she were prohibited from attending due to their lack of status. After her father's death, Eva also lived in poverty with her mother who was the sole provider for the family after she moved to Junín out of fear of social ostracism. Her experience of hardship and rejection at a young age made Eva emotionally susceptible to human misery and eventually fueled her political involvement.

The events of August 22, therefore, were a personal and emotional blow that can be fully appreciated only by taking into account the story of Eva's life told in the convention of a soap opera with a bitter ending. After years of hardship and struggle for recognition, instead of the acceptance she anticipated from the country's elite, she was publicly reminded of her place as an outsider. She is irrevocably excluded from politics for being an illegitimate child, a provincial, and a woman in a *machista* culture. At the same time, however, her provincial origin provides her with strength and heritage that is somehow dignifying. As the testimonies about her childhood point out, Eva was exceptional: she had *raza* (25), an innate quality that elevated her from her surroundings; her particularly pale complexion made her physically different; and she was always able

to impose her will by the force of her anger. Juárez, presumably her second cousin, gives this assurance: "Se aguantaba, era distinta, como toda la gente que tiene la mala suerte de estar llamada a un destino no común..." (66-67). Eva was different from the beginning. The daughter of a forgotten Argentina, she was destined to reclaim the legitimate place of those who had been ostracized.

The second perspective on the events of August 22 is Eva's, presented in a conversation with Father Benítez. It shows the specific emotional sensibility with which she understood politics and her role as the spiritual mother of the nation. In a declaration that is part of a conversation with her confessor she admits that the experience of August 22 could be compared to the sort of pain provoked by her illness:

> ¿EL ALFILERAZO? Sí, lo sentí así, como una punzada tan dolorosa como las de la enfermedad. ¡Hay golpes tan fuertes...! Ocurrió lo inesperado: el pueblo estaba vivo y era libre. [...]
>
> Usted estaba presente. Usted sabe de qué hablo. Es un acto como sexual, y allí nace la verdadera democracia, como algo biológico, y no la democracia de los doctores...
>
> Dejé de llorar y en la penumbra empecé a sentirme como le dije, alzada por una fuerza invisible, absolutamente espiritual, como lo debe ser una aparición de Dios. Era algo que sólo puede venir de muy alto. Algo que cuando se produce, como el amor o la maternidad, una comprende o siente o intuye que tiene realmente esencia divina.
>
> Un clamor profundo, una comunión sin hostias. Una comunión de corazones. La multitud forma un enorme animal terrible y santo. Y una sube llevada por ese gran corazón invisible. Asciende por el espacio, flota sobre la ciudad. ¡Qué fuerza de hermandad!
>
> Me consagraban, ésa es la palabra, padre. Viví los minutos más maravillosos que cualquier ser pueda vivir. No puede haber nada más sublime. Aquello era la democracia en carne viva. ¿Quién puede hablarme de democracia con artículos de código en la mano? (39-41)

As this excerpt shows, Eva draws a parallel between the nation and her body, and the reaction of the crowds demanding her involvement in the government is felt as a physical sensation. In fact, she acknowledges a sensibility to the will of the people that is

manifested by her physical response. This direct translation of the disposition of the crowds to her body is a sign of Eva's total identification with the cause of *Justicialismo* and is mentioned on several occasions in the novel. She refers, for example, to the military opposition to Perón as the cancer that eats the country, like the disease affecting her body: "Argentina y yo tenemos un mismo cancer. O lo vencemos, o caeremos juntas" (73).

The empathy for the Argentinean people described by Eva explains her interpretation of the events of August 22. The spontaneous declaration of trust and fidelity of the crowds gathered in front of the CGT building has a spiritual dimension for her that exceeds politics and is perceivable only through the realm of emotions. She witnesses what she calls a "living democracy" which is unstructured, organic, and natural as opposed to the intellectual democracy based on artificial laws. Once again, Eva appears not as a politician but as a believer and social activist authentic in terms of her beliefs. The reader is confronted with the same kind of rhetorical kitsch with which *La razón de mi vida* is written. However, what seems naïve and manipulative in her autobiography has greater authenticity in *La pasión según Eva* thanks to the narrative strategies of having others speak about her.

The passionate approach to politics that Eva expresses in the novel is confirmed lastly in a third perspective on the events of August 22 narrated by Eva's personal secretary Renzi. He remembers her tenseness before the occasion and her feelings of betrayal by Perón at having to renounce an honor the people claimed for her and she thought she deserved. He also confirms the manicurist's opinion that she dearly wanted the title of vice-president. Finally, he adds an anecdote that depicts Eva not as member of

the political elite but undeniably of the "people". Looking at her dogs barking she remarks: "¿Sabe, doctor? Tienen tanto *pedigree* que si supieran, en lugar de ladrar, ellos también me insultarían" (44; original emphasis).

Eva's voice commenting on the events of August 22 reflects an emotional understanding of politics and an affectionate connection with the people. Both, the manicurist's and Renzi's accounts confirm that this relationship was mutual, which legitimized Eva's power. This emotional perception of the world leads her in the novel to radicalize her political thinking and apply the same exclusionary rules in defining the nation that characterized regimes before Peronism. The oligarchy, the mediocre and the *vende-patrias* should not expect to be part of the nation in Eva's rhetoric.

In view of her position, it is not surprising that Eva Perón appears in the novel as a political radical who perceives her political struggle in terms of a conflict between good and evil, as is evident in the presentation of the conflict with General Menéndez. The General attempted to overthrow the Peronist regime on September 28, 1951, but did not gain the necessary support of the troops and was disarmed. Eva demands his immediate execution. She is infuriated and she shouts at Perón after he informs her of the coup:

> – ¡Me imagino que ya habrás dado la orden de fusilarlo! ¡No quieren que una mujer esté en el poder, pero no vacilan en sacar los tanques a la calle en contra de la Constitución y de las leyes! Si hubiese llegado a la casa del gobierno, él te habría fusilado. Y a mí también, ¡como a Claretta Petacci! ¡Fusilarlos!, ahora o nunca, para que nada siga igual. ¿Cómo es posible que ese viejo salga para acabar con nosotros y nosotros, que tenemos la mayoría nacional, el pueblo y la Constitución detrás nuestro, no hagamos lo mismo? ¡Fusilarlos! Antes del amanecer. ¡Lo que no se hace en las primeras veinticuatro horas no se hace nunca! (112)

Her will to resolve Argentinean political problems with the use of force appears several times in the course of the novel. As her physical condition deteriorates, she secretly

organizes an armed force: she makes preparations for a large scale military operation and hires a German veteran of the Second World War and ex-counselor of the Kuomintang, the mysterious General Von F, who puts a plan in place for the training and future actions of urban guerrillas (29, 45-48, 76). Moreover, she personally buys guns for her army (146, 149, 152-54) and involves certain military officials in her plans. In other words, Eva Perón makes preparation for a final confrontation with the Peronist opposition and is driven emotionally towards her objecive. At the very beginning of the novel she exclaims: "¡Hay que seguir, hay que ir a la madriguera, exterminarlas con un lanzallamas!" (20), "¡No pueden soportar al pueblo! ¡No pueden soportar la verdadera nación! ¡Hay que exterminarlos, Renzi!" (21).

Posse makes sure, therefore, to emphasize the destructive side of Eva Perón's political passion and the fact that, had she lived, she might well have started a bloody revolution characterized by political extremism of religious dimensions. "Eva estaba en la claridad de su furia. Santificada en su llama más pura, más allá de toda razón o verdad" (21) says one of the narrative voices at the beginning of the novel and another adds that she was determined to start "la guerra justa" (153) and "imponer al pueblo como único protagonista de todo orden futuro" (153). In her political passion, Eva is a radical who elaborates lists of her opponents in order to eradicate them when the moment comes (232). She also abuses her power to change her birth certificate (88-89), control the press (196-98), and blackmail the female candidates of the Peronist Women's Party (261-65), all in the name of the greater good.

As in the case of her nomination for the vice-presidency, Eva's demands for an exemplary punishment of the renegade general are ignored by Perón and, once again, she

is betrayed in the name of "la historia" (115) and "el poder de las braguetas" (121). General Menéndez is forced to go into retirement instead of being exemplarily executed as she had demanded. For the second time in the last months of her life Eva's importance is diminished because she is a woman.

Eva's gender is closely related in the novel not only to her marginalization but also to the idea of passion. If she perceives politics emotionally and is driven to radicalism it is because of a sensibility portrayed as characteristically feminine. The fragments of the novel centred on her artistic life in Buenos Aires (116-46, 155-72) illustrate her femininity. They serve of course to show her perseverance, strong character, and struggle for social recognition, but underline just as importantly her passion for expensive clothes, her desperate efforts to meet standards of feminine beauty, and her gracefulness.

Eva Perón, the woman, is idealized in the novel in fragments that stress her charm and attractiveness that at the same time do not corrupt her qualities. The theories that Eva Perón owed her acting career to sexual favors are contradicted in the novel by anecdotes emphasizing that the men who indeed helped her, like Agustín Magaldi (94-96) and Emilio Kartulowicz (135-37), did so because they were genuinely charmed by her personality. Although the bohemian world of artists and actors of Buenos Aires in the 1930s and 1940s was grimy, Eva was never affected by it, as one of her friends recalls:

> Es curioso, pero ese mundo nunca la manchó. Se deslizaba como un ser impoluto, como ajena a su propio cuerpo. Eva nunca fue cómplice de "aquella mediocridad", como calificaba al mundo de farándula de entonces. Y yo le puedo asegurar que nadie, absolutamente nadie, del medio teatral y cinematográfico, la recuerda comprometida de algún modo con sus protagonistas. Neruda tiene un verso muy bueno donde habla de alguien muy puro, intocable, que, según su imagen, se desliza como un cisne de fieltro por aguas cenagosas. Así fue ella. (142)

The Buenos Aires episodes of Eva's artistic career, revealing an ambitious young woman full of life, have considerable dramatic effect in the novel in light of her approaching death. However, those fragments also serve to emphasize that she was a woman, a fact which had an impact when she entered politics where she always presented an alternative point of view. The most obvious consequence of her presence was the right to vote granted women under the Peronist regime which has been claimed as due to her intervention. For Posse, however, the quality she possessed as an alternative political power is more important than her contribution in the feminist movement. She was inspirational as a model of an independent yet elegant woman, a figure who smiled from the pages of fashion magazines with the charm of a movie star. As her confessor sums up:

> Eva se había creado una zona de poder paralelo, afectivo, estrictamente *femenino*, pero fortísimo e inesperado. Un poder pasional, que quedó marcado a fuego del alma del pueblo. La gente sintió que ella usaba el poder para el bien común, en el sentido más aristotélico de esta fórmula. La gente no hubiese dado la vida por Perón [...], pero estoy seguro que no hubiese vacilado en morir por Evita Perón. (249; original emphasis)

The source and reason of the affectionate relationship that Eva shared with the masses and which gave her this unique political and social power was her love for Juan Perón which has to be understood in a particular way. While still an actress, Eva confesses to a friend:

> "Silvana, no se deje engañar por ninguna apariencia de brillo, todo es efímero. Cuando uno encara algo así, tan grande como el amor, hay que apuntar al sol, a lo máximo, ¡al sol! No se engañe con ningún hombre con espíritu menor. No se detenga en lo efímero, por brillante que fuese..." (144)

Her comment gives an idea of the type of relationship that Eva had with Perón. She found her "sun" because the man she fell in love with represented a better future for the people. Therefore, Eva fell madly not only for Juan but also for his vision of the nation. In the novel, she does not separate those two ideas: Juan is the nation and the nation is Juan. For this reason, she is able to extend her affection for a human being to the entire nation embracing, *avant la lettre*, the notion of the Spiritual Mother of the Nation. Once again the rhetoric of *La razón de mi vida* comes to mind. Perón was seen there as a mythological condor taking care of all Argentineans represented as sparrows. This type of metaphor, when used in *La pasión según Eva*, however, lacks the naivety of its use in the autobiography because it is told as an anecdote by Eva's close friend, thereby giving the story a sense of realism.

The meaning of Eva's last appearance at Juan's side during his reinstatement on June 4, 1952, is juxtaposed in the novel with Juan and Eva's love story (160-248). Their relationship is described by different voices who all affirm the purity of the spiritual and emotional bond between the presidential couple. Their love affair is told sentimentally in the convention of a popular romance. Like all love stories, it starts with love at first sight:

> EL ENCUENTRO DECISIVO de Perón y Eva fue realmente en aquel caluroso 22 de enero en el Luna Park, en el infinito festival para reunir fondos para las víctimas del terremoto de San Juan.
>
> Usted sabe que conozco todas las versiones sobre ese episodio decisivo para la vida de Eva. [...]
>
> Eva quiso tener a Perón, y lo tuvo. Lo dejó desconcertado con aquel osado, inesperado y espectacular:
>
> – Gracias, Coronel, por ser, por existir... (160-64)

The narrative voice in this excerpt admits that there are many versions of the first encounter between Eva and Perón which means that the story has been romanticized in popular culture. Other voices that describe their relationship seem to confirm this image

by referring to Eva and Juan as passionately in love, living together scandalously, unmarried, in Perón's small apartment (185-186, 243-45). As in any good romance, their love was of course forbidden, unaccepted by the military elite which ostracized Eva from the beginning. While their relationship unfolds, Perón becomes increasingly popular among the working classes and a threat to the ruling regime. Eva, thinking herself the source of hostilities against Perón is ready to sacrifice herself and leave him (208-10) but he opposes the idea and wants to elope with her, a plan cut short by his arrest (210-12). When Perón is imprisoned by the regime, Eva is not presented as the fighting activist who organized popular manifestations forcing the government to free Juan Perón, but as a woman devastated by separation from her lover, as she admits herself in a letter to her friend Vera quoted in the novel:

> Dicen, además, que me puse a trabajar con una energía demoníaca – mi cualidad casi natural – para contratar a centenares de camiones y autobuses para organizar la marcha sobre la capital. Ilusos, los gringos. Fui un fracaso. [...]
>
> No servía para la política, Vera. Ya ves: estaba anulada por el amor. Vale para la mujer lo que dice Martín Fierro: "Es sonso el cristiano macho cuando el amor lo domina." (212-15)

Yet again, Eva is not defined as a calculating politician but as a woman in love driven by emotions. The uniqueness of Eva's relationship with Perón consisted in the fact that her love was reciprocated in like manner. One of the narrative voices is Felix Luna, a historian and an anti-Peronist, on his own admission, who provides the narrator with an original letter that Perón sent to Eva after his arrest when he thought he would be executed (217). The impartiality of the historian offers empirical proof of the intensity of the love between Eva and Juan.

In light of their feelings for each other, the event of June 4, 1952, when Eva Perón appeared for the last time in public, to accompany her husband at the inauguration of his second term in spite of her difficult condition and deteriorated health, acquires the symbolic proportions of a sacrifice made for love:

> 4 DE JUNIO DE 1952. [...] Respiró profundamente tres veces, tratando de detener los deslizamientos de su mente y de su vista en el mareo. Y después como lo estaba temiendo, sintió la feroz puñalada, el alfilerazo, detrás del cuello, como entrando desde la clavícula hasta el esternón. [...] En total serán dieciséis minutos de dolor puro, si es que el dolor me ataca. [...]
> Eva trata de ensayar el saludo. Trata de mostrar los dientes, como en una sonrisa permanente. (318-28)

According to the testimonies of people who accompanied her that day, Father Benítez, Renzi, and an unidentified woman, Eva made a superhuman effort to attend the ceremony as an expression of affection both for Perón and for the people. Thus, Posse shows how Eva's love for Perón is transformed into an emotion directed at the people, so that her charitable activity was not a political strategy but an expression of her passion for the nation. The events of June 4 were therefore a farewell to her love, Perón and the people.

The last event represented in the novel is of course Eva's death. Since she is basically uninvolved as a narrator in this part of the novel, I will refer to it briefly. The account of her demise takes the form of a tribute given to her by the people, an illustration of the reciprocal affection discussed above with respect to the account of her renunciation of the vice-presidency. The primary narrative voice disappears almost completely, leaving the storytelling to others. Eva's confessor compares her to Teresa of Calcutta (297). Another voice calls her a "Rimbaud de la política", "una Bolívar" (298) because, with Perón, they changed Argentina, pulling off a "gauchada" (299). At the same time, there are testimonies in which Eva's death appears as a personal experience.

Her gynecologist recalls Juan Perón shedding a tear at the news of her cancer (308). Father Benítez evokes her struggle with pain and compares it to Calvary (321-28). Eva's driver reminisces about her courage and strength in her last days (328-31). Doctor Taina recalls her love for Perón and for the people that filled her until the end (336-37). The last moment is narrated by Sara Gatti, her manicurist, who prepared her for what would become her transformation into Santa Evita. As Gatti tells us, Eva describes how she wishes her hair to be arranged after her death and makes sure that Gatti knows what color she should paint her nails. All the narrators are somehow engaged emotionally in Eva's death and reflect it in their references to small details related to her last moments that have touched them at a very basic and emotional level.

Abel Posse's portrait of Eva Perón emphasizes the emotional dimension of her personality, which became the foundation for her relationship with the masses. In this respect, his Eva resembles the heroines of radio plays, such as Napoleon's lover Maria Walewska, with whom Eva Perón identified. She loved the man and the cause he represented. The concept of love driving Eva's political activity is not new with Posse, as we have seen, but was already expressed in Peronist propaganda. When Posse tells this same story with all her imperfections he does not diminish her legend. For Posse her most relevant feature is her passion for the nation whose authenticity is confirmed by the variety of voices heard in the novel. The question of her being right or wrong, fair or unfair in her judgements is secondary.

La passion según Eva expresses a longing not so much for the return of Peronism as an ideology but for the kind of faith in Argentina and emotional patriotism that she emanated and which could and should unite the nation. What Posse demonstrates is a

non-hegemonic view, one that arises not from a legislated or imposed view of the nation but from a passion for the country and its people. Nationalism is shown to be a matter of feeling. It is inclusive not only because it embraces all Argentineans but because it incorporates the good and the bad. And it cannot be expressed as a single narrative or in linear fashion if it is to account for all these properties.

Conclusion

My analysis of historical novels in Argentina stems from a particular historical context defined by a crisis related to the last military dictatorship and the socio-economic transformations that followed it. In light of these events, the national narratives that had been used to legitimized a pathological regime characterized by organized state terror aimed at physically excluding part of society from national life lost their credibility. After the fall of the regime, the governments that followed implemented neoliberal policies, such as trade liberalization, and the privatization and de-monopolization of public services, which resulted in yet another form of exclusion of a substantial segment of Argentineans from national life based on an economic factors. Moreover, the politics of oblivion adopted by neoliberal governments amounted to a further manipulation of national narratives in that they excluded consideration of significant events from the recent past in order to maintain a political consensus essential for the economic transformation of the country.

The historical novel of post-dictatorship Argentina was written against this background and proposed a critical reading of national narratives that had been characterized by principles of exclusion present in Argentinean culture and politics since the nineteenth century. Resisting the totalizing tendencies of traditional narratives, the historical novel assumed a position of inclusion, proposing a vision of the past that could provide a legitimization for the new, democratic Argentina of the post-dictatorship period. With this phenomenon in mind, I have explored different aspects of inclusion in three contemporary Argentinean historical novels: *La tierra del fuego* by Sylvia

Iparraguirre, *Ese manco Paz* by Andrés Rivera, and *La pasión según Eva* by Abel Posse. In light of my analysis, I wish to highlight, by way of conclusion, several main motifs that emerge as characteristics of the novel beyond those attributed to the genre by critics such as Fernando Aínsa, Seymour Menton, and María Cristina Pons. These are: the deconstruction of national narratives characterized by mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion in the definition of the nation, the reformulation of the national project based on inclusion, and finally the narrative strategies that allowed new constructions to emerge.

La tierra del fuego is an account of an Argentinean sailor, Jack Guevara, who tries to discover his own identity as someone caught between the English tradition of his father and the gaucho heritage of his mother. Guevara tells the story of the encounter between the British and the Amerindians of Tierra del Fuego at the beginning of the nineteenth century which led him to reevaluate the dichotomy of civilization and barbarism on which the Argentinean nation was built. Guevara is highly critical of the notion of civilization. The ideals it embodies, that the British Empire forcefully implements in the four corners of the world, do not correspond to the reality he encounters in London, ostensibly the heart of enlightened society. Moreover, the British do not see in Guevara a representative of civilization, that he sees himself, but an example of barbarism. The critique of civilization leads Guevara to an appreciation of the barbarism embodied by the captured Yamana Native Jemmy Button (Omoy-lume in his own language) and a reconsideration of his own identity. His account is therefore written against the expectations of a nineteenth-century European reader and the Argentinean political elites who shaped the country on a model that Guevara learned to assess critically. The objective of his account is to include in the history of his country the story

of Omoy-Lume who represents the Indigenous inhabitants of Argentina, excluded from the nation by an elite blindly fascinated by Europe. The report about the encounter between the inhabitants of Tierra de Fuego and the British followed by its consequences becomes a text that defines Jack Guevara. It includes the Indigenous and the British, the pampas and London, and it is not addressed to the men who rule the World but entrusted instead to a *mestizo* woman, that is to say, to an individual marginalized for her gender and double racial identity, suggesting that the future of Argentina cannot be exclusively patriarchal or dominated by a single ethnic group.

The redefinition of history through the inclusion of elements omitted from national narratives is the most significant feature of the second novel I have analyzed. In *Ese manco Paz*, Andrés Rivera presents the nineteenth-century constitutional conflict between Unitarians and Federalists as a personal confrontation between José María Paz and Juan Manuel de Rosas. The two political and military leaders are presented, however, in a light that avoids mythologizing their exploits and focuses instead on aspects of their private life, their physiological needs, sexual urges, and secret passions. The narrative is highly fragmented and gives the reader an impression of chaos in contrast to the organization of historical texts which endeavor to give order and meaning to the past. Paz and Rosas are described as opposites, but, after a careful reading, it becomes evident that both men merely represent different facets of the same passions, fears, and needs that define their condition and the existence of the nation. They are the two sides of the same coin. In Paz are to be found certain ideals and spiritual values that underlie his idea of *patria* while Rosas is defined by his urges and biology. In other words, Paz and Rosas together represent the whole human being, suggesting that the conflict that has divided

Argentina for years is in some ways natural and that they should be brought together so that national unity may be pursued. Paradoxically, their conflict is also a path towards unity, consisting not of homogenous sameness but in the reconciliation of differences by tolerating their co-existence.

The idea of a project that unites the nation and embraces all its members also emerges in *La pasión según Eva* by Abel Posse. The story of Eva Perón's life takes the form of a *biografía coral*, that is, a narration told by multiple voices, including members of Argentinean society who represent different social groups and classes. Given her complexity and the variety of opinion about her that is part of her history, it is impossible to represent her in a traditional linear narrative without simplifying the significance of her life or the impact it has had. Eva is, at the same time, past and present; she is the Eva *compañera* who lit revolutionary fires in hundreds of Argentineans, the Eva who brought Argentina to the verge of civil war, the Eva who smiled from magazines, and the Eva interpreted by Madonna in *Evita*. The many voices included in the novel provide opinions that express a range of emotions, from adoration to hatred, so that the text embraces her ambiguity. However different and conflicted the opinions about Eva might be they are united by a perception of her that leads to a definition of the nation in terms of an emotional attachment having both positive and negative dimensions.

The number and popularity of historical novels in post-dictatorship Argentina seem to suggest the presence of some sort of national feeling of nostalgia. Whether or not this is the case, however, it is not a nostalgia for any particular period of Argentinean history or the perspective of a particular social group. The historical fiction of the post-dictatorship refers to different periods of time, from first contact with the Amerindians to

recent history, including the period in between of the colonial times, national emancipation and the formation of the modern nation, and the turn of the twentieth century. In fact, certain novels, like Federico Andahazi's *El anatomista* (1997) which retraces the career of a gynecologist in Renaissance Europe even refer to foreign history. The point of view adopted in historical novels also escapes generalization because they narrate history from the perspective of groups forgotten or omitted from traditional historical discourse as much as they focus on well known historical figures.

If the national feeling of nostalgia that the historical novel meets is a longing for a national narrative, it would be naïve to think, however, that it directly proposes a national project for the nation at the turn of the twenty-first century. The role of literature and of intellectuals in defining Argentina is far from having the same relevance they had in the nineteenth century when the first national narratives were written. However, by offering a critical reading of national history, the historical novel offers a way of reading the past. It creates a theoretical frame for a conception of history within a democratic society where all of its members have the right to belong and to express their opinions without fear of persecution; where definition of the nation takes diverse ethnic and social groups throughout history into account; and where the memory of the disappeared, both of more distant and recent times, persists in narratives that address Argentinean identity.

The historical novel also proposes a framework for viewing the past that refuses to provide a totalizing narrative for the nation. The temporal and/or discursive fragmentation characteristic of the novels discussed along with the possibility of narrative polyphony, suggest an historical project that escapes closed and definite structures or one sided points of view. The fact that the genre abandons, by definition, the goal of

disclosing one single truth about the past and instead advocates a vision characterized by the possibility of many truths suggests that Argentina can be an open project. Thus, although the historical novel does not advocate in favor of traditional ways of understanding the nation and its origins and constitution, it provides, nonetheless, a model that may yet allow Argentina to embrace certain utopian aspirations.

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